

HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
Faculty of International Business



**THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON  
CLOTHING AND FASHION PERCEPTION:  
A STUDY ON FINLAND AND THE NETHERLANDS**

HELSINGIN  
KAUPPAKORKEAKOULUN  
KIRJASTO

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Minna Vainikka  
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## ABSTRACT

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### **THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON CLOTHING AND FASHION PERCEPTION:**

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##### **Research problem and objectives**

Clothing and fashion have well reflected the characteristics of individual societies and cultures in the past. The emergence of global fashion has thus standardized fashion and made it a one form of industrial goods, available for everyone. In the academic research and literature there is a debate whether cultural differences still exist and if the converging economies unify consumer preferences and consumption. Despite of the importance of the fashion and clothing businesses, there is little research done on the impact of local culture on the way one dresses and perceives clothing or style. This study aims to explore the impact of socio-cultural factors on clothing and fashion perception using Finland and the Netherlands as target countries, as well as to investigate how these factors influence preferences. Additional objectives are to examine how the fashion system incorporates into the perception formation process and to reveal the differences and similarities in the clothing preference between the target countries.

##### **Methodology**

The research is qualitative in nature. It is based on 21 in-depth interviews with professionals from different disciplines working close to clothing and fashion businesses. The interviews are conducted in Finland and the Netherlands during winter 2007-2008 and they are based on the theoretical framework developed for this study. Additionally, other secondary data sources were used to support the interview information. The original framework was revised based on the analysis of the empirical research.

##### **Results of the study**

Based on the literature review and empirical research, the study confirms that socio-cultural factors have an impact on consumer perception in clothing and fashion. Cultural values in specific shape the appreciation towards symbolic brands and status dressing. Subcultural categories further shape the perception formation, which can be used to distinguish consumer preferences into smaller segments. Finally the market structures and fashion system has own characteristics in the target countries that make the clothing and fashion businesses differ from each other. Additionally there is a distinction in homogeneity versus diversity of the markets. Because of this there are different marketing implications suggested.

**Keywords:** clothing, fashion, consumer perception, cultural values, subcultures, fashion system, Finland, the Netherlands



## **SOSIOKULTTUURISTEN TEKIJÖIDEN VAIKUTUS MIELTYMYKSEEN VAATETUKSESTA JA MUODISTA:**

### **TUTKIMUS SUOMESTA JA ALANKOMAISTA**

#### **Tutkimusongelma ja tutkimuksen tavoitteet**

Vaatteet ja muoti ovat ennen erinomaisesti heijastaneet yksittäisen yhteiskunnan ominaispiirteitä ja kulttuuria. Globaalin muotiteollisuuden syntyminen on kuitenkin tehnyt muodista standardoituja teollisuushyödykkeitä jotka ovat jokaisen saatavilla. Akateemisessa tutkimuksessa ja kirjallisuudessa käydään keskustelua kulttuuristen eroavaisuuksien olemassa olost, ja mikäli toisiaan lähentyvä talouselämä yhdenmukaistaa kuluttajien preferenssejä ja kulutusta. Vaate- ja muotikaupan merkittävästä asemasta huolimatta, tutkimusta on tehty vähän lokaalin kulttuurin vaikutuksesta ihmisten pukeutumiseen sekä mieltymykseen vaatetuksesta tai tyylistä. Tämän käsillä olevan tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia sosiokulttuuristen tekijöiden vaikutusta vaatetukseen ja muotiin käyttäen Suomea ja Alankomaita kohdemaina, sekä selvittää kuinka nämä tekijät vaikuttavat preferensseihin. Tämän lisäksi tavoitteena on tutkia kuinka muodin systeemi liittyy mieltymyksen muodostamisprosessiin ja mitkä ovat kohdemaiden eroavaisuudet ja samankaltaisuudet vaatepreferensseissä.

#### **Tutkimusmenetelmä**

Tutkimusmenetelmä on laadullinen. Se pohjautuu 21 syvähaastatteluun eri alojen ammattilaisten kanssa jotka työskentelevät läheisesti vaate- ja muotikaupassa. Haastattelut tehtiin Suomessa ja Alankomaissa talven 2007-2008 aikana ja ne perustuivat teoreettiseen viitekehykseen joka kehitettiin tätä tutkimusta varten. Tämän lisäksi muita toissijaisia tietolähteitä käytettiin haastatteluinformaation tukena. Teoreettista viitekehystä muokattiin empiirisestä tutkimuksesta tehdyn analyysin perusteella.

#### **Tutkimuksen tulokset**

Perustuen kirjallisuuskatsaukseen sekä empiiriseen tutkimukseen, tutkimus vahvistaa sosiokulttuuristen tekijöiden vaikutuksen kuluttajien mieltymykseen vaatteista ja muodista. Kulttuuriset arvot erityisesti muokkaavat symbolisten brändien ja statuspukeutumisen arvostusta. Alakulttuurien kategoriat muokkaavat mieltymystä tarkemmaksi, jota voidaan käyttää eri kuluttajaryhmien mieltymyksen segmentoinnissa. Kohdemaiden markkinarakente ja muodin systeemi eroavat toisistaan ominaisluonteeltaan joka vaikuttaa siihen, että vaate- ja muotikauppa eivät ole samankaltaisia kohdemaissa. Tämän lisäksi markkinoiden homogeenisyys versus heterogeenisyys vaihtelevat mikä asettaa erilaisia toimenpiteitä markkinoinnille.

**Avainsanat:** vaatteet, muoti, kuluttajan mieltymys, kulttuuriset arvot, alakulttuurit, muodin systeemi, Suomi, Alankomaat

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Background*

In the post-modern era, aesthetic taste is spreading through all levels of society. The value of design, product form and aesthetics is recognized in the business and academy. The product shape influences consumer behaviour by attracting consumers to a product, communicating to them, and adding value to the product by increasing the quality of usage experiences associated with it. (Borja de Mozota 2003, Bloch 1997)

Consumers' design preferences may be largely defined by socio-cultural unanimity on what looks good, what materials are to be valued, what is worth aspiring towards, and how aspirations can be reinforced with material goods. (Crilly et al. 2004) It is not just these established conventions of taste but also general trends and temporary fashions, which may influence response. In particular, the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the times) contributes how designs are interpreted and the extent to which they are accepted by society. This may influence the market's conception of how a product should look like and the styles which are acceptable. The relationship between product design and values is particularly interesting in the context of cultural studies, because implicit and explicit values are often seen as key determinants of culture. Besides functionality, products are being purchased because they shape the consumer's lifestyle and reflect their values, which can be transformed semantically into the product through the product design. (Karjalainen 2004) The cultural contexts within which designers (or companies) and consumers operate may differ greatly from each other. When consumers interpret the objects there might be a totally different relationship between the user and object because of the cultural and sociological background of the consumer.

One huge, global design industry of major economic importance is clothing and fashion industry. Fashion is a subject which is simultaneously economic, aesthetic, social and psychological and is dependent on a rapidly changing infrastructure influenced by art, popular culture, technological innovation, politics, and trade regulations. Change in fashion is the motivating factor for replacing clothes, cosmetics, furniture, housewares and automobiles (Stone 2004, 4). Fashion commodities and visual images are shared across cultural boundaries, because of the international character of apparel production



and retailing and electronic media respectively (Kaiser 1990, 515). Homogeneity in styles and scarcity in cultural contents are found in common among the modern global fashion that is predominantly manipulated by the multinational giants (Azuma & Fernie 2003, 418). The principle of industrial clothing design is to offer clothing to the mass at the right time, and therefore they are able to sell it in lower price when the production series are big. One could question if the consumer has any decision power at all when purchasing clothing. Trend forecasting companies produce analysed information and prognoses of the future trends in the consumer markets. These forecasts help designers try to mirror the changes in the societies globally and therefore new fashion expresses the Zeitgeist. Trend forecasts also help producers, wholesalers and fashion buyers to decide which clothing, styles and colours to take for retailing. Finally these trends are enhanced by media and similar clothing styles are sold simultaneously in retailer chains. Common misconception is that designers and retailers dictate what the fashion will be and then force it upon helpless consumers (Stone 2004, 5). In the end it is the consumers who decide which clothing to buy and what the fashion will be by influencing new designs and by accepting or rejecting offered styles. As clothing has become internationalized, information about the criteria that consumers use for selecting clothing should help to increase sales for a trading merchant (Kawabata and Rabolt 1999). Many clothing retailers have expanded throughout Europe, while it is well known that large differences still exist between the European countries. De Mooij and Hofstede (2002) even conclude that there is no reason to believe that converging technology and disappearing income differences across countries will ever lead to far-reaching homogenization of consumer behavior. Rather, consumer behavior will become more heterogeneous because of cultural differences. Previous research on business has noticed the differences in taste and style across cultures and countries. As Katie Lawson, purchaser at TopShop (English fashion retail company) puts it:

*Clothing style differs a lot across Europe... I was very impressed in Spain how sexy the women dress. In England the women have a rock chic -look. Thus in Sweden the dressing style is surprisingly dull, but in Iceland the women are capable to exploit the local culture in their clothing style in an innovative way (Väre 2005, 37).*

Clothing retailer C&A in Europe standardized buying in 1997. In June 2000 the company decided to close all 109 stores in the United Kingdom and Ireland after

substantial losses because the taste of British and Irish consumers differed from the taste of continental Europeans (de Mooij & Hofstede 2002, 62). Similarly Marks & Spencer sold broadly the same offer worldwide in the early 1990s because they saw that tastes in fashion were becoming more alike. Thus, Marks & Spencer stopped their international expansion, and as a result the closure of stores at the start of 2000 makes one wonder whether there can be one global market at all. International clothing companies need to understand profoundly consumer response to clothing design across cultures. Also the socio-cultural moderating effects on the consumer response must be identified. Given these considerations, the objective of this thesis is to study the socio-cultural factors which moderate the consumer response on clothing and fashion and therefore affect the preferred styles and designs in different cultures.

## ***1.2 Research Gap***

Moderating effects of socio-cultural factors on clothing preferences across cultures is not a widely researched topic in business studies, although it is recognized in the research (Kaiser 1993, Kawabata and Rabolt 1999). Taking culture into the research of consumer behaviour will lead to a larger view of the context in which dress phenomena occur (Hamilton 1993). Crozier (1994), Bloch (1995), Monö (1997), Coates (2003) and Crilly et al. (2004) have researched consumer response to product design. They have drawn overviews of product design response deriving from semiotics and psychology. Karjalainen (1999) and Sharafutdinova (2006) have researched consumer response on industrial design objects (the former on automobiles and the latter on mobile phone design) across cultures and have found the socio-culture to have a moderating impact on product perception.

Clothing design has been previously studied in many environments. The largest field of studies, conducted in clothing design, derive from human environment which covers sociology, psychology, physiology, philosophy and pedagogies (Blumer 1969; Davis 1992; Greenwood & Murphy 1978; Polhemus 1996; Rubinstein 1995) in which the main focus has been in the analysis of the needs which clothing arouse in people. Clothing in a cultural environment covers research areas such as semiotics, art, history, ethnology, anthropology and feminist studies. Clothing has been previously researched also as a form of social communication in the contexts of sociology, aesthetics and



feminism. Economy, ecology and technology are environments in which clothing has been researched as well. Viewing all the fields of clothing studies, it can be concluded that clothing research is multidimensional, multimethodological and multidisciplinary (Anttila 1995, 54). Fashion studies have thus focused on the cultural studies, trying to prove the fashion process and fashion change theories. (Blumer 1969) Lately there is an increased interest towards global fashion and cross-national market segmentation (Ko et al. 2007).

Although the research has been drawing theories on clothing and fashion, there is a lack of international and consumption perspective on it. The gap in the research might be explained due to its paradoxical nature; it is both art and business. Creativity is required when making fashion products and it has always been about designer's ideas. Today, though, one cannot examine the art side of fashion without also talking about the customer. Also the definition of clothing and fashion has changed over time, and the concept of fashion does not include just clothing anymore but also other consumer products such as mobile phones, interior design, as well as cultural products like movies and music. Therefore fashion has become more complex and dynamic, in which the consumer culture is in the central role.

Kawabata and Rabolt (1999) conducted a research on clothing purchase behaviour between US and Japanese female university students, and found differences in terms of evaluative criteria of buying clothing and fashion, information sources and money spent on clothing. Similarly Kim and Farrell-Beck (2005) researched apparel styles worn by young women in the USA and South-Korea in the 1970s and found similarities and differences in the styles, which derived mainly from cultural values and social changes. Approximately all cross-cultural studies on fashion, brands and product design are conducted in America or in North-East Asia, and therefore there are gaps in the European perspective on design, as well as in cross-cultural consumer behaviour in clothing. Despite of global fashion industry, the social and political background of a given place still has considerable impact on the way one dresses. Local culture, the economic situation and physical features of people, their religious background and the political regime can determine the acceptability of a particular dress code in a community (Azuma and Fernie 2003, 418). Hofstede's country values model is often



used in explaining cross-cultural differences in brand perception, product design (Karjalainen 1999, Sharafutdinova 2006), and fashion buying behaviour (Kawabata and Rabolt 1999). Often the differences in values are researched between culturally distant countries and evidently clear differences are found in behaviour and perception. However there is no research on culturally similar countries like Finland and the Netherlands, which belong to the so called Nordic culture group (Waarts & van Everdingen 2006), and for that reason this study aims to find out the differences and similarities between the countries and within the culture group. One could assume that the similar value base should lead to the similar moderating effect on consumer's perception of clothing. Thus if there are differences in the consumer perception, there can be other socio-cultural factors distinctive for that country, which have a different moderating influence on the design perception. In particular the fact that Finland is very homogeneous and the Netherlands very diverse country brings an interesting research area on the fashion perception study. Ethnic background of the consumers may have a big moderating effect on their clothing purchase decision.

### ***1.3 Research Objectives***

The aim of the study is to understand the consumer perception of clothing and fashion design in general, and to find out the socio-cultural factors, typical for two nation states, Finland and the Netherlands, that moderate the consumer response on clothing design in specific. It is attempted to understand what national and regional characteristics of people in a given area influence consumption and behaviour and how these characteristics influence these. In addition this study is focusing on the process of perception formation.

The main research questions are:

- Which socio-cultural factors influence the consumer response to clothing design and style, and how?
- What are the differences and similarities in the socio-culture (i.e. values, lifestyles, subcultures, prevailing style, symbolic meanings and consumer behaviour in general) that affect the preference for certain clothing in Finland and in the Netherlands?
- How does the fashion system influence consumer perception making?

The visual and aesthetic nature of clothes and fashion offer an interesting prospect for cross-cultural appreciation. Especially country-specific style and Zeitgeist bring an interesting research area on this field, which has not been covered before. Since there is little literature available on this research topic beforehand, the goal of this study is to explore and give an explanation for consumer preferences between cultures. This research can also be seen as cross-cultural semiotic study, which studies how clothing's meaning is constructed and reflected across cultures. The objective of a cross-cultural study is to strike out the compromise between cross-cultural differences and similarities (Kaiser 1990) and therefore this study is also related to the discussion of convergence and divergence of consumer behaviour.

### **1.3 Definitions**

In order to avoid confusion what is understood in this study with the concept of fashion and clothing, the terms need to be defined. *Fashion* is a noun as well as a process. In this study it is defined as the design of clothing and lifestyle accessories created within the cultural and social influences of a specific time. It is also a dynamic process by which new styles are created, introduced to the public and popularly accepted by that public. In short, it is the constantly changing taste in clothing. With *clothing* (also dress, garment, costume and apparel) it is meant wearing clothes, and it can be found in all societies and cultures where people wear clothes. It refers to actual garment constructed from fibre and connected to human body (Rubinstein 1995, 4-5). Clothing is necessity and material production, when fashion is an excess and symbolic production. Clothing fashion is then a style of dress that is temporarily adopted by a majority a social group, no matter how small that group is.

*Style* is the characteristic or distinctive appearance of a garment. Compared to fashion it is constant and has a diversity of distinctive classic signatures or ways of expressions. *Design* in this context is a unique combination of silhouette, construction, fabric and details that distinguishes a single item of clothing from all other objects of the same class or style (Sproles 1979). *Taste* in clothing and fashion refers to prevailing opinion and sensitivity of what is and what is not artistically pleasing and appropriate for a specific situation. Finally the definition for *socio-culture* comes from culture and society. Culture is based on the perspective that it is the overall system within which



other systems (e.g. economy, institutions, family, and consumption) are organized. The principles of economy are themselves expressions of a specific kind of culture (Solomon et al. 2002, 442). Socio-cultural factors belong to macro-social environments that have broad and powerful influences on the values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behaviours of individual consumers.

#### ***1.4 Limitations***

The purpose of this study is not to reveal the whole process and different elements of consumer response and preference to clothing design and styles, but to concentrate on the socio-cultural moderating factors, which influence the preference on clothing design. Since the concepts of culture and fashion are dynamic in nature, their role in the clothing design and consumer preference formation is tried to outline. Fashion is narrowed only to clothing fashion, which is the institutionally produced and marketed style of dress characteristic of a given society or given groups within that society at a given point of time (Kawamura 2004).

The study is conducted by comparing clothing design and fashion in two nation-states: Finland and the Netherlands. Therefore it has not been attempted to create a framework which would be applicable for all contexts and all designs or fashions. The reason for analysing nation states is that every aspect of a socio-cultural system is represented in it (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002). Only the macro- and meso-level socio-cultural factors are studied and micro-level factors, such as individual and psychological factors, are left outside the investigation. Individuals are influenced by their culture and their social groupings; therefore, they are conditioned by their socio-cultural environment to act in certain ways. Only derivatively can their behavior be called psychological. Before psychology come culture, family, and group norms (Venkatesh 1995, 5). The individual and situational factors have an impact on consumer response as well, but due to the scope of the study they are left out of the investigation.

When studying cultures on macro level, generalisations cannot be prevented. This thesis is outlining the general distinctions between cultures, but it must be kept in mind that each individual is unique when it comes to preferences.



### ***1.5 Structure of the Study***

This study is constructed as follows. Chapter 2 discusses clothing design and fashion and analyses design perception and consumer response formation process in relation to clothing design. Chapter 3 analyses socio-cultural factors which have an impact on a consumer behavior and elaborates the possible relation to design perception. The theoretical framework for the empirical research, which is formed based on the literature review, and the method of research are presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the empirical research. Finally, a summary of the findings, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research are given in the concluding chapter 6.

## **2 CLOTHING, FASHION AND DESIGN PERCEPTION**

This chapter examines the concepts clothing, fashion and design perception. Clothing and fashion are separate concepts, because they have different social consequences, which causes that often these concepts are used interchangeably in literature (Kawamura 2004). In this study both of the concepts and their characteristics are examined separately. In order to understand how and why people dress, we need to understand different categories and systems of clothing - fashion being a big part of it. After the characteristics of clothing and fashion are presented, the design perception process is being discussed.

Fashion and clothing are considered as applied arts, which simultaneously engage with the worlds of art, craft and industrial design and yet belongs to none of them (de la Haye and Wilson eds. 1999). It is not self-evident that fashion and clothing design would be part of design: even though clothes are three-dimensional, they are not arbitrary like for example products of industrial design are. A special character of clothes is their mobility that they move from place to place with the user. Clothes have a unique relationship with the user and clothes are dependent on the user. Therefore clothes are difficult to categorize compared to other artifacts. However we can notice that this special character of clothes is being transferred to other areas and products of design. More and more products are designed with a personalized look to wear and carry with. Clothes are not a separate type of design, thus in them colors, forms, materials and design aspiration are connected to each other, like in other artifacts. We can notice that clothing design and product design have become closer to each other (Raunio 2000).

### ***2.1 Clothing Design***

Clothing is found in every society or culture where people wear clothes. Clothing is material production, tangible and a necessity item (Kawamura 2004). Clothing has different practical functions. The first one is the protection perspective, e.g. to keep body warm (Raunio 2000; Rubinstein 1995). Clothes are also worn for the sake of modesty to cover nakedness, which is socially defined and varies among individuals, groups, societies and over time (Rubinstein 1995; Stone 2004), but also for immodesty to accentuate sexual attractiveness of the wearer (Jones 2002, 18). Clothing worn as



adornment enriches the physical attractions and enables its carrier to communicate individuality, creativity, group membership and role behavior as well as to distinct between sexes (Rubinstein 1995, 21-25). Symbolic differentiation refers to wearing certain kinds of clothing to recognize and differentiate religious affiliation, profession, lifestyle or social standing (Jones 2002, 19). The sixth function, social affiliation, is the reason for a person to dress alike to belong to a group. Jones (2002, 20) claims that those who do not conform to the accepted styles are assumed to have divergent ideas and are ultimately mistrusted and excluded and conversely those who conform without sensitivity to the rules of current style, are perceived as being desperate to belong and lacking in personal taste and style. Psychological self-enhancement by using fashion and clothing is a way to communicate one's personal identity. Finally modernism can be expressed by wearing fashionable clothing.

Some clothing may become fashion at a given time. All fashion is clothing, but not all clothing is fashion. Clothing and different styles thus exists, even though they are not fashion. For a particular clothing or style to become fashion, it must be worn by some people and then accepted as fashion (Kawamura 2004). For example white t-shirts are produced and worn by many people, but they are not in fashion, but instead the latest style.

### **2.1.1 Clothing types**

Clothing can be divided roughly into two categories, in order to separate them between ready-made and custom-made. Haute Couture (high fashion or high sewing) belongs to custom-made. The clothes are considered technically superior since they are individually measured, cut and custom-made or custom-designed for specific client. (Kawamura 2004) Haute Couture has become a loss-making system of advertisement for highly profitable franchise lines such as scent and stockings, or as a form of what sometimes almost amounts to theatrical costume for a very few public figures. Nonetheless Haute Couture is still important as a laboratory of ideas and exploitation of the finest materials and craft skills. However, this is becoming less so as the market for couture has fallen to some two or three thousand clients worldwide (de la Haye and Wilson eds. 1999, 6), the majority of whom are wealthy, elderly Americans (Jones 2002, 26). Therefore Haute Couture is not researched in this study, because of its marginal role in the clothing

consumption.

Prêt-à-Porter (ready-to-wear or ready-made) is made for mass-market. The garment is made in bulk, more or less to standard sizes and to cover as many wearers as possible (Kawamura 2004, 74, Jones 2002, 25). Ready-to-wear lines are used to market licensed goods and lucrative diffusion lines (de la Haye and Wilson eds. 1999, 6). Ready-to-made industry manufactures basically three kinds of clothing lines: 60-70 % of the sales and profit is based on so called core products (classic models and fashion), 20-30 % bases on fancy-products (season's fashion clothes) and 5-10 % on fantasy clothes. Fantasy clothes are interest arousals, like Haute Couture, which are made for creating certain kind of image of the company among the consumers (Nuutinen 2004, 53).

Ready-to-wear collections can be divided into designer collections and confection collections. Designer collections have a high quality, an excellent finish and a unique cut and design. These collections are the most trendsetting compared to Haute Couture and confection. (Moore et al. 2000) Designer ready-to-wear collections contain often concept items that represent a certain philosophy or theory. These items are not so much created for sales but just to make a statement. Confection collections, on the other hand, are the once we see most commonly in our shops and which we wear every day. These collections are designed by stylists. The brands, that produce these collections, aim for a mass public and are in general not searching for new grammar for the language or a new point of view on fashion.

### **2.1.2 Contextual model for clothing research**

The research of clothing has had several viewpoints, but lately there has been a shift towards contextual framework and methodology, which is multidimensional and multimethodological (Anttila 1995). Clothes and other artifacts of material culture are all embedded in contexts. Kaiser (1990, 1993, 1995a) has suggested that a contextual approach to the study of clothing needs to attempt to generate some integration of three broad areas of knowledge:

- a) social cognitive perspective
- b) symbolic interaction
- c) cultural theory



When researchers realized that the methods in psychology and social psychology are not sufficient enough to study multidimensional clothing, they took symbolic interaction theory next to it (Honkavaara 2000, 276). Kaiser among others name George Herbert Mead as the leading researcher, who suggested that in the process of symbolic interaction, cultural symbols and their meanings affect people's behavior (Kaiser 1990, 23). Finally, it was not until at the end of 1980 when researchers started to get interested in cultural aspects in product buying behavior (Honkavaara 2000). Kaiser (1990, 1995a) has combined these three theoretical viewpoints, which she calls contextual framework.

Social cognitive perspective consists of people's thinking process, observation and comprehension of him/herself and others. The models show how people use clothes and related materials as cues to simplify their understandings of the world (Kaiser 1995a, 7). These materials enable individuals to develop and maintain social categorical systems to classify and perceive one another but at the same time taking into account the context. People have the need to explain social situations, when dress gives cues, determines and explicates people and context (Kaiser 1990, 34-37).

A symbolic integrationist perspective reminds of the agency that individuals exercise in the creation and use of materials, images and ideas (Kaiser 1995a, 7). Individuals actively construct meanings and appearances. People and their outlook cannot be isolated from the context in which they occur. People so to say live in a symbolic environment next to the physical environment, when their behavior is affected by symbols and physical action (Honkavaara 2000, 277). Since people communicate some things about themselves through clothing, at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments (Davis 1992, 4).

The cultural theory refers to people's way of examining his/her environment which derives from his/her own culture. Culture has an impact on how values and ideologies develop and shape up as well as how they are produced and changed (Honkavaara 2000, 277). Individuals can affect the formation of culture through clothing decisions (or other material artifacts).

Kaiser concludes that the study of the social meanings of textiles and clothes and, more broadly, appearances requires a very complex mixture of aesthetic, cultural, economic, social, political and psychological concepts and methods. Moreover as styles change and fashion becomes more global than ever due to international economic conditions, there is a need to be open to different ways of knowing and valuing material traditions (Kaiser 1995a, 8). The contextual model reminds us of studying clothes in their social, symbolic, cognitive and cultural contexts (Kaiser 1995a, 8).

Honkavaara (2000) conducted a study of postmodern clothing in Finland based on the Kaiser's contextual perspective model and found out that people value and compare other people to self with the outlook of clothing. Also clothing seemed to be an area where people loved to talk about other people's ideas and views, but own experiences were left out, or they were intertwined with common opinions. Also aesthetics, style, communication and sign systems got an increasing weight in clothing and life of the interviewed people (Honkavaara 2000, 285-286).

## ***2.2 Fashion***

Compared to clothing fashion is an unclear definition, since it refers to different material objects (clothing, furniture, car, mobile phones) as well as to nonmaterial cultural products (music, science, lifestyles). In this thesis fashion refers solely to the clothing fashion. Fashion has many facets: its sources in culture and social structure, the process by which it diffuses within and among societies, the purposes it serves in social differentiation and social integration, the psychological needs it is said to satisfy and its implications for modern economic life (Davis 1992, 4). Since fashion is neither tangible nor visible, fashion system operates to convert clothing into fashion that has a symbolic value and uses clothing as a symbolic manifestation (Kawamura 2004). Fashion does not sell objects but meanings, and that is how it fulfils the consumer's desire to own something that is "in fashion". Furthermore fashion is said to have a language through which clothing and adornments are used to express personal and social information, and therefore it exists in a specific cultural and organizational context. Therefore fashion has come to be seen as synonymous with the spirit of individualism and consumption characteristic of Western European industrial capitalism (Cannon 1998, 25).



In the following fashion is examined through Greenwood & Murphy's (1978, 56-57) absolute fashion statements, which are also introduced in Nuutinen's dissertation (2004, 60-91). They conclude that fashion is the prevailing style, fashion reflects its time, fashion is a change and fashion is acceptance (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 57).

### **2.2.1 Fashion as a prevailing style**

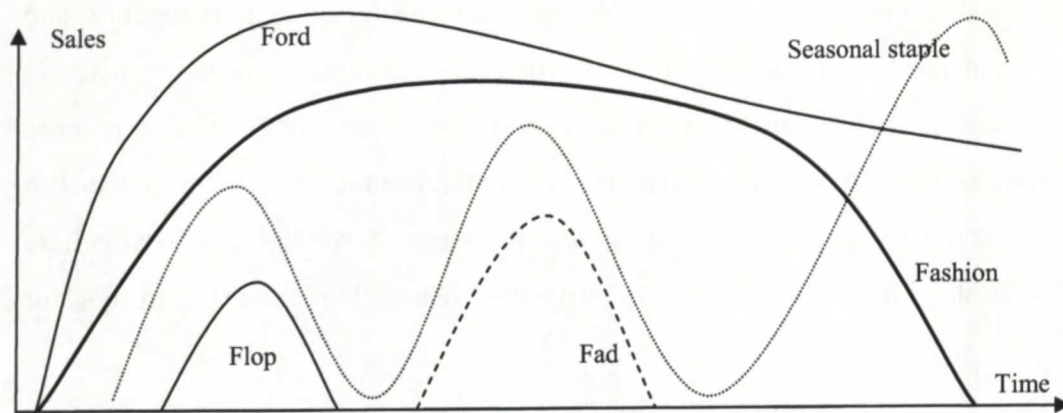
In the simplest way fashion can be defined as the style or styles which are the most popular in a given time-period (Brannon 2000, Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 57). It can also be defined as the collective style in clothing, dressing and behaviour, which is adopted by a certain group of people in a certain time, and which is held commonly appropriate in certain contexts and time. The common tastes and lifestyle of members of society collectively form and represent the taste and lifestyle of that society (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002a, 11). Individuals and society use fashion to communicate their lifestyle and taste. Style is a choice, that consumer makes from the prevailing fashion(s). *High Fashion* refers to a new style accepted by a limited number of fashion leaders when *mass fashion* consists of styles that are widely accepted (Stone 2004, 6). Style can be linked to personal, individualistic difference, and fashion to an accepted norm (Polhemus 1996). Style can exist even though it doesn't become fashion. The fashion designer creates styles and the consumers purchase fashion (Nuutinen 2004, 61). Polhemus (1996, 19) differentiates style and fashion by examining them in temporal context. Fashion has fluctuating value over time – it gains or losses value and is coming in or going out of fashion. Style on the other hand defines change in pursuit of the timeless. Styles are no longer conceptualized only as style eras (e.g. Grecian, Roman, Renaissance, punk, 1960s style) but style refers also to lifestyles and their connections to cultural phenomena or people. When such styles come back to fashion, their basic elements remain the same. Minor details are altered to reflect the taste or needs of the era in which they reappear (Stone 2004, 6).

Taste is closely related to style. Taste is a personal preference (individual perception and judgement) to what one likes or dislikes. It is also a shared opinion of what looks good, or does not look good, and what is according to good convention (Nuutinen 2004, 63). An individual is judged according to his or her taste and ability to live by the norms of the society. It can also give a membership in some groups and exclude from others.

(Arnoud et al. 2004). Taste is culturally and historically specific preference and therefore a dynamic definition which is constantly changing. Taste is partially instinctive and partially learned in social interaction (Jones 2002). Therefore taste cannot be valued with aesthetics criteria, but in relation to time and culture, in which it is produced and defined (Nuutinen 2004). Taste is an area, in which the popular culture is often in clash with the high culture. One may also wish to flout good taste to shock or amuse.

Different styles have different **fashion cycles**. Predicting the time span of a fashion cycle is impossible since each fashion moves at its own speed (see figure 1.). Fads become fashionable very fast, move very fast through the system and disappear. They last usually shorter time than one season and occur only in specific consumer group. Fad can though become fashion or classic fashion. Fads brake social and ethical taboos or good taste, but seldom have an effect on institutions, values or styles. Fashions and style features are widely approved and are reflect the conventional taste. They last longer than a season and likely reappear seasons or years later. Classic fashions (ford) are styles which keep on selling over the seasons. They are usually approved styles by many consumer groups simultaneously for a longer period of time, such as jeans and T-shirts (Jones 2002; Nuutinen 2004). Classic styles are also usable dependent on the season and innovator fashion. The normal flow of a fashion cycle can be interrupted or broken by outside influences such as weather, changes in group acceptance. It is though believed that a broken cycle usually pick up where it has stopped once conditions return to normal or once the season that was cut short reopens (Stone 2004, 14). Preoccupation that are shared by many people at the same time are largely responsible for the ebb and flow of fads, fashions, trends and styles (Coates 2003, 67).





**Figure 1. Variations in the fashion cycles**

### **2.2.2 Fashion reflects its time**

People's orientation towards continuous change and progress can be generally found in all post-modern societies. Fashion is one of the most visible media of the change (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002a, 11). It reflects the past, current and future time flow and the spirit of the times (Zeitgeist). Zeitgeist is the cultural, spiritual and ideological climate of an era, which influences people's thinking and feelings and which in turn, is expressed in his or her consumption behaviour and choices. Therefore, the fashion and lifestyle of a particular time symbolise "the spirit of the times" (Blumer 1969). Fashion reflects various kinds of expressions of time. It is a mirror of aesthetic life, social change, economic success or failure, political strife or its absence, technological advancement, psychological implications and current events (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002a; Greenwood & Murphy 1978). Good economic situation has an increasing effect on fashion consumption. It is not just the consumption power of people, but during a poor economic situation consumers make conservative and classic purchase decisions (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 62). However fashion buying is not related to price anymore, since the mass production has made fashionable items available also for the middle class. Also social status and position had earlier a bigger impact on clothing decisions, but nowadays their role has diminished, since welfare has spread more equally within social classes in the Europe, and on the other hand retail chains like H&M, Mango and Zara have made the consumption of fashionable clothes for an inexpensive price possible. Subgroups like teenagers and ethnical minorities have a bigger impact on individual, since consumers want to be accepted by their peer-group.

Also some role models or celebrities have an impact on clothing decisions. Politics can be also reflected in fashion. Fashion is said to be a consequence of social angst and it can be influenced by political personalities. (Greenwood & Murphy 1978) Technology had its major impact on mass production of clothing. Nowadays technological development can be seen having its major effect on communication. Fashion innovators can see the latest fashion collections via internet instantly and therefore new fashions or styles spread all over the world faster. Also companies which base their clothing design on imitating the renowned designers can copy the designs instantly and bring them into their own collections.

Fashion reflects what the culture thinks, feels and does in a certain period of time. The role of the designer is to reflect the *Zeitgeist* in the design. It means questioning the reasons of different phenomena and trends, and trying to predict the future of fashion. Unlike clothing signs and symbols, that tend to be somewhat stationary, fashion reflects the socio-cultural dynamics of the moment at a more frenzied pace (Rubinstein 1995, 13). Current diverse and chaotic fashion reflects post-modern time. Functionality and decoration are related to post-modern design, which means that design forms are connected from different contexts into the target. The goal is not to design a harmonic, cohesive form but forms which evoke feelings and symbolic associations (Nuutinen 2004, 69). The designer needs to know every season what the consumers want, what they will buy, whether they want more of the same or if they are ready for change. However if the designer's cultural society is not the same as the customer's society, the designer might be unable to reflect the consumer's society and feelings in the design.

### **2.2.3 Fashion as a change**

Fashion can be seen as a change process in which the clothing changes its colour, style, material and shapes and form a new visual entity. The lifecycle of clothes may be very short, and new clothing fashion replaces the old for some reasons other than better quality. People's needs change slowly, but their desires faster, and therefore fashion can be changed constantly and sell over and over again (Nuutinen 2004, 71). Even if it may appear that fashion changes suddenly, it comes of as a result of gradual movements from one season to the next and from one style to another (Stone 2004, 20). A German inquiry has shown that according to Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian buyers, their



customers buy clothes for the following reasons, in order of importance: 1) change in fashion, 2) attractive price, 3) special occasion (e.g. wedding), 4) label, 5) habit to shop regularly, and 6) to replace old worn-out garments (Paakkunainen 1996, 109). Clearly physical and functional reasons to buy clothing are not the most important ones, thus buying fashionable items is.

#### **2.2.3.1 Fashion process theories**

The selection process of fashion is researched previously from the micro-, meso- and macro level. Herbert Blumer introduced his sociological theory for fashion process in the 1960, which critiqued Simmel's class struggle approach (Kaiser 1990, 487). According to Blumer fashion is the outcome of a **collective selection** process. (Blumer 1969) From a variety of different clothes and styles, merchandise buyers and distributors choose only those clothing models, which they hold emotionally the most relevant. Without knowing what the others select, interestingly all buyers and distributors select the same models. This happens because they share a collective taste and knowledge of fashion items and styles which are accepted this season by the consumers. From these selected clothing only those clothing styles become fashion, which are perceived likeable and bought by consumers (Blumer 1969). According to Blumer (1969) fashion does not arise from class differentiation, but from people's desire and need to be 'in fashion', in other words, to be modern and to express the spirit of the times. However collective selection is likely to be tempered or moderated by aesthetic trends, social structure and the inner workings and social world of the fashion industry, as well as social-psychological processes and political and economic tensions (Kaiser 1990, 491). Davis (1992, 27) focused on the micro-level, individual characteristics and claims, that fashion is the byplay of identity ambivalence and dress. Looks and appearance articulate who we are and who we are not, and by buying and wearing appearance signs, individuals and groups search for a place in the social order (Kaiser 1990, 511; 1995b, 42). Kaiser et al. (1995) have explained the fashion process with a symbolic interactionist (SI) theory, which acknowledges an interaction between micro-level (individual) and the macro-level (socio-dynamic forces). SI theory consists of five principles which occur at the individual and at the society level:

- 1) Human ambivalence;
- 2) Appearance-modifying commodities in the marketplace;

- 3) Symbolic ambiguity;
- 4) Meaning negotiation; and
- 5) Style adoption.

They argue that solving human ambivalence created by variety of appearance modifying commodities in the marketplace is the basic motivation to cause changes in fashion and style. In society level, the cultural ambivalence is likely to propel individuals to experiment with appearance (Kaiser 1990, 510). Kaiser's model thus more questions than answers about fashion change. The SI theory was criticized to be unclear in describing and defining the link between the macro and micro levels. Additionally it based on view that there is only one underlying force responsible for fashion change. Thus it was argued that there are various ranges of fashion commodities presented by the economic/cultural system from which individuals may choose.

Cholachatpinyo et al. (2002a) have enriched Kaiser's model by integrating social and lifestyle factors into the model. Their model acknowledges also the macro-micro continuum. The fashion transformation process model begins and ends at the individual level but it is in a continuous cycle from fashion concept to commodification through lifestyles and social trends. These new lifestyles are interpreted by fashion designers and translated then to fashion concepts. At the individual level there are two forces which dominate the fashion change. Differentiating force impacts fashion choices of innovators and socialization force the fashion adaptation of followers and laggards. The balance between these two psychological forces drives individuals to adopt fashion.

Law et al. (2004) have added contemporary thoughts in the fashion change theory and fashion consumption. Due to the complexity of current fashion market they investigate the relationship between fashion change and consumption through chaos perspective. They argue that the interaction of being fashionable, perceived fashionability and system participation affects the ultimate decision on fashion consumption. Their model includes three bounded conditions: cultural context, the social system and the perceived degree of fashion of consumers. Different social values and norms in the culture and society can direct consumers' attention towards specific types of fashion in a period of fashion change.



### 2.2.3.2 Sources for fashion change

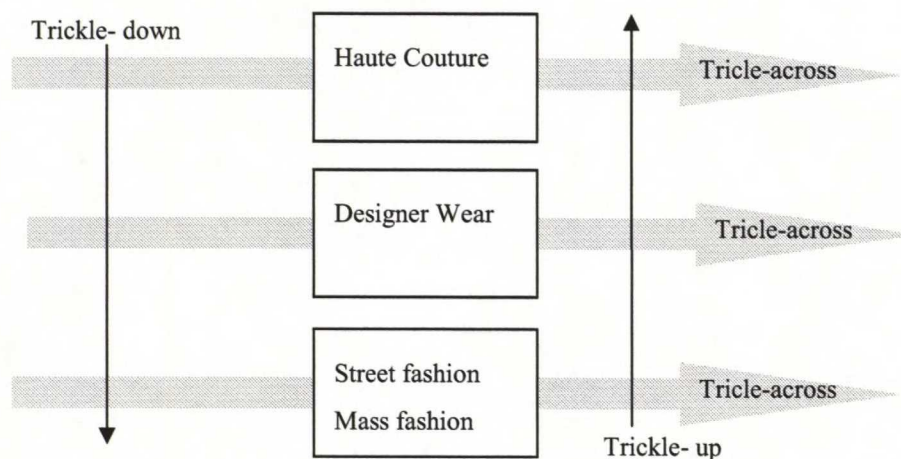
Current literature acknowledges three different sources from which the change in fashion can start and spread from: high culture (fine art, literature and classical music), pop culture (television, music, movies and celebrity culture) and low culture (special interest groups outside the mainstream), but none of these cultures work alone in isolation (Jones 2002, 34). Rather the current fashion market gets its ideas from all of these sources.

**Trickle-down theory** (traditional adoption theory, downward flow), is the oldest and the best known sociological fashion adoption theory. Fashion is a hierarchical process in which ideas move from top to bottom. The ideas are produced by the designers but also by the elite, who function as a gatekeeper and use the fashion as a way to differentiate themselves from the lower social classes. (Frings 1982; Nuutinen, 2004; Jones 2002) The lower society classes imitate the fashion used by the higher society classes, in order to visually fulfil the needs to belong to the higher social class. In this process the elite loses its visual signs of higher social class, and therefore they need to create new signs of fashion. The essential facts of trickle-down theory are: existing differences between social classes, the meaning of clothing as sign of individual's social class and the desire to imitation, belonging to a group and differentiating oneself from others (Nuutinen 2004, 75; Davis 1992, 110-112). Haute couture fashion is an example of trickle-down fashion adoption process. When fashion is being imitated, the original fashions lose their significance and become progressively vulgarized when they reach the mass market. (Davis 1992, 110-111) Trickle-down theory has lost its explanation power due to the accelerated production and consumption cycles. The wealthier middle class was able to adopt new fashions faster than the elite and the enhancement of trade brought fashion accessible to an increased number of people (Nuutinen 2004, 75) Additionally, mass media is largely responsible for the speedy spread of certain popular styles (Jones 2002, 35).

According to **trickle-across-theory** (horizontal flow, simultaneous adoption theory, mass-market theory) fashion can arise from any socio-economical class and spread horizontally within each class and throughout the industry at the same time. (Sproules 1979) Speed of production (i.e. mass production) combined with mass communication

is of greatest importance (Frings 1982, 52; Kaiser 1990, 492; Sproles 1979). This theory was born in the 60s when middle class was growing, and therefore the production of disposable clothing increased and designers started to produce trends into all social classes and responding to their specific needs. The power of media also affected the fashion markets from the late 1970 onwards. The designers could not decide which styles were in fashion, but consumers started to select more carefully which styles suited for them and to listen to the media which told them to create their own styles (Nuutinen 2004, 76). At the centre of this theory lies the hypothesis that real leadership of fashion comes from within a person's own social class, and especially from peer groups.

The third theory is called **trickle-up theory** (reverse adoption model, upward flow, bubble-up theory) (Frings 1982, 51; Jones 2002, 33; Polhemus 1994, 10). According to this theory fashion is generated in the lower social classes by special interest groups or otherwise marginalized groups, and infiltrated into the upper class either through the middle class, or in synergy with the upper- and lower classes into the middle class (Jones 2002, 35; Kaiser 1990, 503; Nuutinen 2004, 77). The ideas may arise among underprivileged young people, who are more liberal than other social groups to discover and create new styles. Second starting point may be either the elite or the bohemian social groups, which want to try unordinary clothing styles. The third starting point may sexual minorities. These groupings are extraordinary 'laboratories' in which one can make experiments without harming the society. Thus their styles can become fashion only then when certain social elite approves and adapts it (Nuutinen 2004, 77).



**Figure 2. The relation of trickle-down and trickle-up theories on trickle-across theory (Nuutinen 2004, 78)**



## 2.2.4 Fashion as an acceptance

A style does not become fashion until it has been accepted – that is, purchased and used by a major portion of the population or a group. No matter how beautiful a design or creation or is, unless the public likes it and wants to wear it, it will never be a fashion (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 74). Fashions are not business-created but people-created through acceptance. It might be that certain fashion is worn only in high-fashion circles and only there (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 74). Fashion does not usually act against the fundamental values of certain society. Blumer has said that a new fashion is accepted the most likely then when it fits within the individual and collective lifestyles, values and norms (Nuutinen 2004, 89), in other words, when it responds to the *Zeitgeist*.

### Fashion cycle and fashion adoption

The process in which the fashion is being accepted is called fashion adoption cycle or consumer buying cycle (see figure 3). The cycle can be best defined as the phased elapsed time from the introduction of a fashion (a new look, a new visual gestalt, a pronounced shift in vestmental emphasis, etc.) to its supplantation by a successive fashion (Davis 1992, 103). It has three phases: 1) introduction phase (innovation and rise), 2) acceptance phase (acceleration and general acceptance) and 3) regression stage (decline and obsolescence) (Davis 1992, 123-158; Frings 1982, 47; Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 69-72).

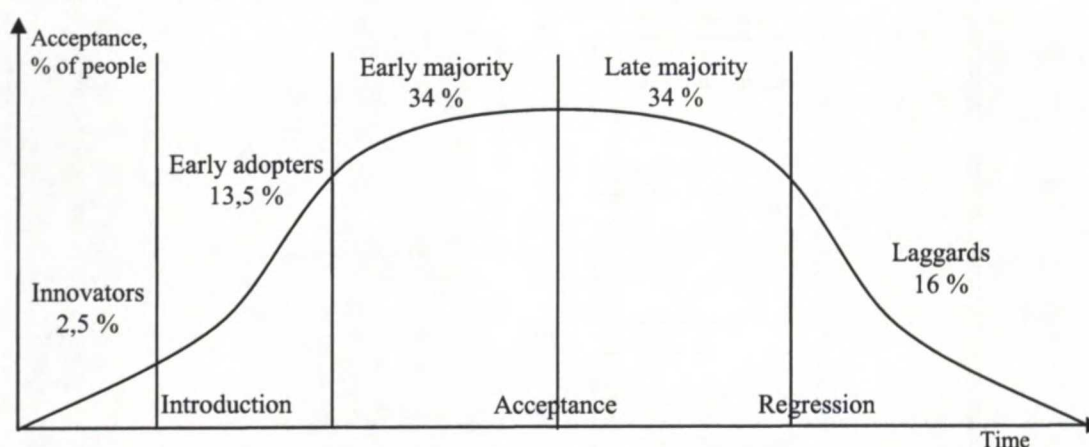


Figure 3. Fashion cycle and adoption

Fashion consumers have been classified into groups correlated to their acceptance of a specific style over period of time. That classification can be represented by the bell curve in figure 3. It bases on diffusion of innovations theory which was formalized by Everett Rogers in 1962. It is a process in which many people decide to adopt an innovation (Sproles 1979, 103). Rogers stated that adopters of any new innovation or idea could be categorized as innovators (2.5 %), early adopters (13.5 %), early majority (34 %), late majority (34 %) and laggards (16 %), based on a bell curve. These percentages and classifications thus vary when it comes to clothing fashion adoption. Normally the percentage of fashion innovators has been about 5 - 5,5 % of the market. If we include also the early adopters in to the innovators the group grows into about 16-20 %. Sometimes early adopters are grouped within the early majority and part of early majority grouped into late adopters. It is not possible to find same percentages for each case, but the fashion cycle follows the bell curve and the people can be distinguished within these different groups. This process of fashion cycle refers to the complex of influences, interactions, exchanges, adjustments and accommodations among persons, organizations and institutions that animates the cycle from its inception to its demise (Davis 1992, 104). Each adopter's individual willingness and ability to adopt an innovation would depend on their awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Also marketing actions and social mobility have an impact on the adoption. (Sproles 1979) Every fashion cycle has also a consumer use cycle which differs from acceptance cycle by beginning after the acceptance cycle and enduring beyond the acceptance cycle's regression stage.

The goal of the classification of people along the diffusion curve is to segment consumers into groups based on in which phase of the innovation diffusion curve they fit in, and therefore to figure out coherent consumption behavior classes and eventually to match right marketing activities with right consumers. The diffusion of fashions can be a complex one because each geographic region and their sub groups are separate social systems where diffusion occurs (Sproles 1979). Additionally not only one fashion emerges at a time but there are a variety of simultaneous fashion trends emerging and completing at the same time at different rates and at different levels (Blumer 1969; Cholatpinyo et al. 2002a). The more fashions there are on the markets, the more trends. These different consumer groups need to be separated in order to fix the adopter



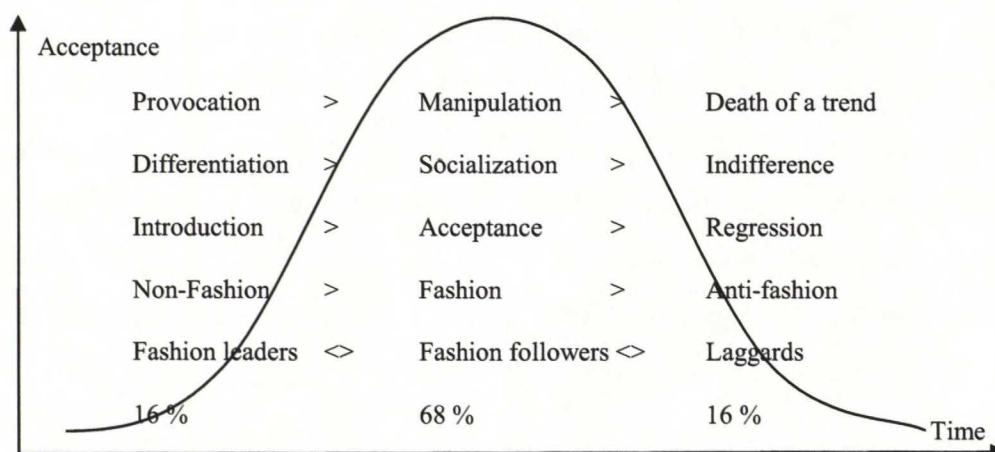
group in a time scale in the diffusion process of a particular fashion style (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002a, 26). Actually one could argue that each brand has to discover only its target consumers.

The **innovation or introduction stage** is the beginning of the fashion cycle. Major fashion trends are usually started by a creative designer who has ability to forecast a trend by sensing what the public wants. During the rising stage of the cycle, a style may not be accepted by anyone and therefore a style or newness is being adopted. (Frings 1982, 47; Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 71) Most new styles are introduced at high price level in high-fashion couture salon, specialty stores and boutiques. This type of fashion is purchased first by fashion innovators who desire for distinctiveness and high fashion and afterwards by fashion specialists who desire sophistication, good taste and appreciate what is new (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 71). Fashion pioneers / innovators create styles and bring new ideas into the social system, which are far away from the conventional taste and style (Kaiser 1990; Nuutinen 2004). They are extremely confident in their standpoints, styles and preferences and therefore the act as important gate keepers. They are unlikely to be influenced by friends, social circle, commercial strategies and media. They feel uncomfortable in wearing similar style and color with many others. As a result the differential feeling drives them to search for new fashion to replace the firmly established one (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002b, 29). Fashion designers, media, celebrities and popular culture are said to be innovators and gate keepers. Early adopters are opinion and taste leaders as well as trendsetters. They are part of local social system, and therefore critical in fostering the fashion innovation diffusion by making the fashion visible among the consumer mass. Celebrities, models, stylists, artists, women, youth, sexual minorities and athletes are opinion leaders (Nuutinen 2004, 84).

As the new fashion is purchased, worn and seen by more people, it begins to raise popularity: it reaches an **acceptance phase**. The popularity of the style may even further increase through copying and adaptation and the manufacturers turn into mass production with the garment. Often the original design is simplified in order to make it more appealing to the mass audience. The sales start to accelerate and finally reach the peak point. At this point the fashion item is sold in all department stores. In the

acceleration phase the early majority (Nuutinen 2004) or the so called fashion realists (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 72) buy and wear the style. They are so called wardrobe builders who are receptive to solid fashion changes that allow fashion to express their personality but they select that fashion which they have been seeing many others wearing and which is surely accepted by their peers. Fashion adopters feel more confident when they wear similar styles as others. Therefore fashion followers are most influenced in their fashion choices by socialization force (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002b, 29). They are interested more in fashion at a price, and they desire durable and practical clothes and basic styles (Greenwood & Murphy 1978). They are radically influenced by media and marketing strategies. Clothing industry is very dependent on these two groups of people, early and late majority, since they form the biggest group of consumers (about 68 %) and make the mass-production of clothing possible (Frings 1982, 52; Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 246-247).

When the style reaches its saturation point of consumer interest, **regression** sets in. At this point only laggards (16 %) buy the fashion. They are outside of the social network of consumption and they buy clothing then when it is necessary and on sale. Clothing industry does not take these people into consideration when bringing new styles in market (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 247). Regression stage starts when fashion-conscious people get tired of the conventional style and start to search for a new one. New styles and fashions are introduced that are refreshing to see. Figure 4 summarizes the concepts and characteristics of the fashion cycle and innovation diffusion process.



**Figure 4. Summary of the fashion cycle and diffusion (adapted from Nuutinen 2004)**



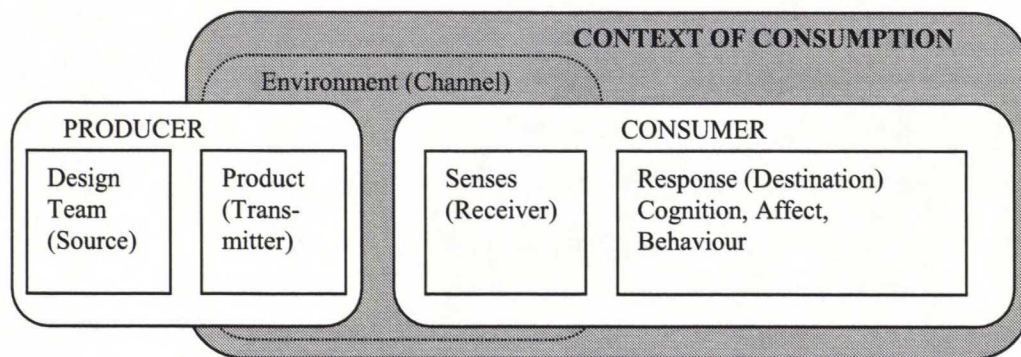
### ***2.3 Perceptual process of design***

A customer's knowledge of a product is acquired through her perception of it. A customer's behavior, then, is determined by how she perceives the products and services around her (Borja de Mozota 2003, 82). The study of how product's design affects observer's perception covers models from communication study (Coates 2003; Crilly et al. 2004; Monö 1997; Rubinstein 1995) and consumer behavior study (Arnould et al 2004; Peter & Olson 2005; Solomon et al. 2002). Shannon's (1948) basic model of communication is the first models to communication system, in which the message is shared (given or received), imparted and transmitted from one adaptive system to another. The consumer behavior model thus focuses on the individual's interpretation process, in which thus the meaning making is in central part. Both of the models are useful to consider when modeling consumer response to product design since they complement each other.

Consumers' interpretation of the design is based prominently on their interaction with the product because they seldom have access to the designers (Crilly et al. 2004). The communication theory implies that design has language and speech which become significant when they are used in a specific social context. (Rubinstein 1995) Clothing images or designs can be seen as signs which have clear-cut meaning or as symbols that have multiple meanings (Rubinstein 1995, 7). According to semiotics products are considered as signs that are interpreted by users and therefore product appearance can be seen as one stage in a process of communication (Coates 2003; Crilly et al. 2004; Monö 1997; Rubinstein 1995). Shannon (1948) has divided the communication system into five elements: source, transmitter, channel, receiver and destination. The source produces the message, which is encoded into a signal and transmitted through a channel. The receiver decodes the message and the message arrives at the destination. According to this model, the channel is the phase where noise/disturbance occurs, which changes the message. In reality, the disturbances in an information process like design are not restricted to the channel. Amongst other things, flaws in construction and manufacture can affect the signal's physical structure (Monö1997, 44).

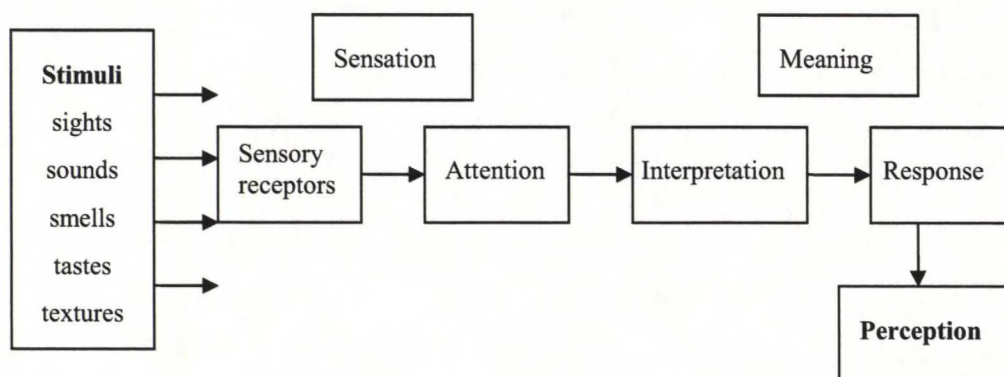
Monö (1997) and Crilly et al. (2004) have presented a communication model for product design perception (see figure 5). In their models the design team is the source of

the message and the product is perceived as the transmitter of the message. The channel is the environment or market in which the product is to be perceived. The receiver is the individual's sensory organs that are eyes, ears, hands, etc. Finally the destination is the response system, which comprises of cognition, affect and behavior. Crilly et al. (2004, 554) have added a context of consumption into their model. Within this context the consumer operates, the design is interpreted and from which influences on this interpretation originate. The consumers' culture, background and experiences are influential in determining their response to design.



**Figure 5. Basic framework for design as a process of communication (Crilly et al. 2004, 551)**

Solomon et al. (2002, 36) divide the process of perception into three parts: sensation, attention and interpretation. Their model focuses only on the consumer side of the perception. In the beginning of the perception formation process is the *stimuli* which can be sensed by the consumer (see figure 6). The response and perception are formed by sensation, attention and interpretation which transformed into a meaning.



**Figure 6. An overview of the perceptual process (Solomon et al. 2002, 36)**



Basic stimuli such as light, color and sound form an immediate response in the sensory receptors. The meaning of a stimulus is interpreted by the individual, who is influenced by his or her unique biases, needs and experiences, which stem from schemas (or organized collections of beliefs and feelings) (Solomon et al. 2002). Perception is then the process of acquiring, interpreting, selecting and organizing sensory information.

Understanding the factors which compose and influence the consumer design perception, helps us to understand the impact of socio-cultural factors on the perceptual process and to outline at which point socio-cultural factors come in to play in the individual's perception process. It can be concluded that the perceptual model is influenced both by individual as social factors, but the question is, that: how do the socio-cultural factors determine the perception of a desirable clothing design? In the following the main elements of the perceptual process are discussed.

### **2.3.1 Elements of clothing**

The perceptual process starts from the producer and the design team who decide how the clothing should visually look and determine the characteristics. The clothing or fashion elements are the art elements that relate to fashion change and allow one style to be distinguished from another. They are line, color and texture. The ways in which these elements can be used are called principles; they are repetition, rhythm, graduation, radiation, contrast, harmony, balance and proportion (Jones 2002, 76). Use of these elements causes a response – sometimes strong, sometimes subliminal – in the viewer or wearer. The process of response formation is a complicated one and it is not always clear why a design works or not. At time the response can even be one of distaste or chock (Jones 2002, 76). From the commercial point of view a good design should evoke a positive response on design and make the consumer to purchase the item.

**Line** consists of two major parts: silhouette and interior line. Silhouette is the overall outline and shape of the dress (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 81) and it is almost always the first impact of a garment, as seen from a distance and before the details can be discerned (Jones 2002, 76). Interior lines create optical illusions, because the eye is influenced by the direction that a line takes. Vertical seem lines create an effect of

length and elegance because they lead the eye up and down the body. Horizontal lines tend to be shorter in span and therefore draw attention to the width of the body (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 81; Jones 2002, 77). Lines also divide areas into shapes and spaces and they develop a rhythm. Lines can be straight or curved and soft or hard, implying rigidity or flexibility. Straight lines seem still and unrelenting to the point of seriousness or sternness (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 80). Curved lines add a certain fullness and femininity to a garment (Jones 2002, 77) and they are considered more graceful than straight ones.

Research carried out by yarn, textile and garment manufacturers and retailers indicates that the consumer's first response is to **color** (Frings 1982, 134). This is followed by an interest in the design and feel of the garment and then an appraisal of the price (Jones 2002, 88). People respond intuitively, emotionally and even physically to color. Blues and greens have showed to lower blood pressure while red and other intense colors can increase heart rate. People also associate colors with different adjectives: white suggests cold, red romance, love, danger and fires; yellow sun and friendliness; grey depression and black elegance. Much of people's emotions are expressed through the colors in life. People brought up in an urban setting will respond to a different palette to those from rural or tropical communities (Jones 2002, 88). Hence design taste is learned by socialization; one's background, social standing and experiences affect the preference for design. Social conventions and symbolic meanings are also attached to colors, which vary between cultures. Madden et al. (2000) conducted a research on consumer preference for different colors and color combinations through an eight-country study. They found that the colors of blue, green and white are all well liked across countries and share similar meanings. In contrast, black and red also received high liking ratings, yet in many cases their meanings were considerably different (Madden et al. 2000, 100-101). Colors have also social and spiritual importance which can be seen colorful flags for all sorts of occasions, uniforms and festivities sad or joyful. Display of red, white and blue evokes feelings of patriotism for both British and French people (Solomon et al. 2002, 38).

Color forecasting is used for clothing but also cosmetics, interior design, lifestyle products and automotive industry. Color forecasters come together twice a year to



decide upon the next year's colors. In the process they observe and interpret the underlying social and cultural context and make projections for the future (Nuutinen 2004; Solomon et al. 2002). Color is the most noticeable of the fashion variables but if the design is out of fashion, no color in the world can make a person want to wear it (Greenwood & Murphy 1978).

**Texture, fabric or material** is both the visual and sensual element of fashion design (Jones 2002, 77) and each texture has its own personality and characteristics (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 84). The texture of a fabric defines the general characteristics of a design. Fabric is selected for its compatibility with the season, desired line and silhouette, price for the target market and color (Frings 1982, 137; Jones 2002, 77). Texture experiences fashion cycles as do design and color (Greenwood & Murphy 1978, 84).

The design elements transmitted by the product are received by the psychological senses like vision and touch. The complexities of perceptual psychology are not presented here in detail, because the main focus is on the macro aspects and their moderating effect on the perceptual process. It is though necessary to mention that consumers have different thresholds of perception; stimuli must be presented at a certain level of intensity before it can be detected by sensory receptors. (Solomon 2002) Nowadays consumers are often in a state of sensory overload, and they are therefore selective about what they pay attention to. (Solomon 2002) After the sensation-phase (see Figure 6), the consumer studies the design, and the cognitive and affective responses to the design are formed which give the meaning for the perceived design to the customer.

### **2.3.2 Consumer responses**

Cognition and affect are different types of psychological responses consumers can have towards product design. They are highly interdependent and may occur simultaneously (Bloch 1997; Peter & Olson 2005). Cognition consists of mental responses whereas affect refers to feeling responses. The third one, behavioral response, comprises cognition and affects and influences the way consumers behave towards the product. In the following these three responses are described thoroughly.

### 2.3.2.1 Cognitive response

Cognitive response refers to the judgments that the user or consumer makes about the product based on the information perceived by the senses (Coates 2003; Crilly et al. 2004). First of all, consumers select only a small portion of the stimuli to which they are exposed for conscious processing, which is affected by motives and the nature of stimulus (Arnould et al. 2004, 308-311). After that the viewer classifies (mainly unconsciously) perceptions into categories and applies prior knowledge about the categories to organize them (Arnould et al. 2004). A major function of people's cognitive systems then is to interpret, make sense of, and understand significant aspects of their personal experiences. To help them do so, the cognitive system creates symbolic, subjective meanings that represent their personal interpretations of the stimuli they encounter. The second function is then to process these interpretations in carrying out cognitive tasks (Peter & Olson 2005, 46). Categorization and interpretation are highly intertwined, since both of them have to do with comprehension and sense making. Next the main impressions, which cognitive system can create, are presented.

First, consumer's cognitive system can create *aesthetic impression* (Crilly et al. 2004) which refers to Crozier's (1994) response to form and Peter & Olson's (2005) interpretations of sensations, which is the sensation that results from the perception of attractiveness in products. Although the subject of beauty has been studied for centuries, there is still no unanimous consensus on what comprises beautiful artifacts (Crilly et al. 2004). Early scholars held the perspective that beauty would be a characteristic of the object (Kaiser 1990; Routio 2007). Certain lines, shapes and colors were believed to be inherently attractive. A turning point in understanding perception was the introduction of the concept of the formation of patterns or outlines (Gestalt laws). When forming patterns, the human mind seems to obey certain regularities, the so-called Gestalt laws. The most important ones are: proximity, similarity, symmetry and closure (Crilly et al 2004, Monö 1997, Routio 2007). Gestalt psychologists argue that objects are perceived as a whole rather than atomistically. There are also other theorists who argue that product related beliefs derive from linear processing of one design element at a time. Perceivers appear to be able to categorize clothing styles on the basis of structural features, or form – that is, silhouette and the shape and the part-to-whole relationship (Kaiser 1990, 291). Bloch (1997) takes the stance that both Gestalt and atomistic



processing occur. The product may first be received as whole. If the form warrants further processing, then individual elements may become salient (Bloch 1997, 19). Crozier (1994, 75) thus argues that good design might merely be the preferences of particular elite groups and just as subject to changes in fashion as is popular taste. He suggests that visual appeal of objects is also influenced by socio-cultural, socio-economic, historical and technical factors. Also Kaiser (1995) holds the same view; perceivers seem to be able to set aside personal preferences and to sort and classify apparel on the basis of objective visual criteria, but values are likely to enter into perceptions of apparel, thereby shaping what is interesting or worthwhile to behold (291). Also Coates (2003) suggests that the information and concinnity of the product derive from the subjective experiences of the consumer as well as from the objective qualities of the product.

A consumer's cognitive system can also create *semantic interpretation* (Crilly et al. 2004) which refers to physical stimuli presented by Peter & Olson (2005) and Crozier's (1994) response to function. It can be described as what the product is seen to say about its function, mode-of-use and qualities. A distinction is made here to a symbolic association, which refers to what the design says about its user. The form of a product elicits beliefs about product attributes and performance. Monö (1997) states that product's visual form may communicate its qualities through four semantic functions: description, expression, exhortation and identification. Description means how product's appearance presents its purpose and use. Expression refers to what properties the product design expresses. Exhortation is intended to trigger a reaction in the person to whom it is directed. Identification refers to the degree of how the origin, affiliation and category are communicated.

*Symbolic association* (Crilly et al. 2004; Peter & Olson 2005) or response to meaning (Crozier 1994) refers to the perception of what the design says about its user or the socio-cultural context of the use: e.g. *this style of dress is appropriate for older women*. Through semiotics it is possible to explain the meaning of clothing. People convey information and misinformation about occupation, origin, personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires and current mood among others through clothing (Kawamura 2004). People use products to communicate their identity to others but also to themselves.

Products are associated with self-expressive symbolisms which serve to differentiate the consumer from those that surround them. Thus categorical symbolism allows people to express their group membership (Crilly et al. 2004). The garments that reflect what the user is or wants to be at the moment will be purchased and worn, and those that do not, will not be purchased and they may be ballyhooed (Lurie 1981, 12). For reference groups and all these kinds of groups, articles of clothing and material objects can have profound significance (Crozier 1994, 113-114). People's tastes and preferences are expressive of and reflect upon their social identity. In the consumer culture branded products are similarly used for identity building and for showing group membership. Barthes (1967) claimed that clothes can be treated as a part of a semiotic system, that is used as a means of communication. Through clothing people communicate some things about their persons, and at the collective level this results typically in locating them symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and life-style attachments (Davis 1992, 4). Symbolism is always culturally defined, and therefore the extent to which a product is seen to reflect or support identity will be determined by the cultural context within which the product occurs (Crilly et al. 2004; Rubinstein 1995). Alison Lurie (1981) sees clothing as a language which are acquired, used and discarded just as words are, because they meet people's needs and express ideas and emotions. For example punks could use clothing as a means of expressing their infantile anger and suppressed longing to be mothered. Davis (1992) on the other hand sees dress as communicating in a manner closer to music: an 'undercoded' form of communication expressive of mood and personality, certainly, but in a manner distinct from linguistic forms (de la Haye and Wilson 1999).

The symbolic associations evoked by a product may be less dependent on product appearance than aesthetic impressions and semantic interpretations are. Still, symbolic associations are not unrelated to product appearance, and it is the designers' job to decode the common values and opinions that exist in the culture and reproduce them in to forms that embody the appropriate symbolic meaning (Crilly et al. 2004, 563). The meaning of a dress or brand identity should therefore be identified in the beginning of the design process.

Consumer's cognitive system can also make interpretations of behaviors (I drink a lot



diet Pepsi), of social stimuli (my friends think Pizza Hut is the best) and of affective responses (I love Dove ice-cream bars) (Peter & Olson 2005). However behavioral response can also be described as a separate system which is an outcome of psychological response. Thus cognitive, affective and behavioral responses are highly interdependent why different categorizations among researchers exist. These different aspects of cognitive response to product form do not describe products as such because they are driven both by tangible stimuli and pre-existing knowledge. Viewers in different circumstances may make different judgments, even though there is often consensus amongst groups and eras (Crilly et al. 2004).

#### **2.3.2.2 Affective response**

An affect is used to describe emotions, moods and feelings related to the psychological response to the semiotic content of the product (Coates 2003; Kaiser 1995). Substantial portion of emotional responses is elicited by 'cultural products,' such as art, clothing, and consumer products. An affective system is largely reactive; it responds immediately and automatically to significant aspects of environment (Peter & Olson 2005, 43). Consumers basically experience two kinds of feelings - positive and negative ones (Bloch 1997; Sharafutdinova 2006) but also a variety of contradictory feelings such as admiration, disappointment, amusement and disgust. Desmet (2003, 1) holds a view, that rather than eliciting one single emotion, products can elicit multiple emotions simultaneously because these emotions are elicited not only by the product's aesthetics, but also by other aspects, such as the product's function, brand, behavior, and associated meanings. The goal of the product design is then to evoke more positive than negative reactions towards product design.

According to the currently most widely adopted theory of emotions (i.e. appraisal theory), an emotion is elicited by an evaluation (appraisal) of an event or situation as potentially beneficial or harmful. An emotion is thus the result of a cognitive, though often automatic and unconscious, process (Desmet & Hekkert 2007, 61). Emotions are personal. This means that, individuals differ with respect to their emotional responses to a given product (Desmet 2003, 1) because of current emotional state as well as past experiences (Kaiser 1990, 292).

Desmet (2003) classifies product emotions into the following five classes: *instrumental, aesthetic, social, surprise, and interest emotions*. Products can be regarded instrumental because products are believed facilitate in accomplishing goals. People have many attitudes with respect to features of products and product style, such as product colour or material. A product that corresponds with the user's attitudes is appraised as appealing and will elicit emotions like attraction (Desmet 2003). Bloch (1997, 20) states that aesthetic responses derive from the design and sensory properties of the product rather than from its performance or functional attributes. In some cases, the attractiveness is based on characteristics of the product's overall form (i.e. Gestalt processing) or on particular details (Bloch 1997; Desmet 2003). Social emotions result from standards which are socially learned beliefs and norms 'how things should be' and 'how people should act'. Products that are appraised as legitimate elicit emotions like admiration, whereas those that are appraised as illegitimate elicit emotions like indignation. The objects of social emotions can be seen as agents. Products are the result of a design process, designer or company, and when looking at the product one can praise its originality or blame the designer for a lack of product quality. Secondly, products are also often associated with particular users or user groups and thirdly, people also tend to apply their social standards to products themselves. Although products are not people, they can be treated as agents with respect to the presumed impact they generally (can) have on people or society. Surprise emotions are driven by the perception of novelty in design. Finally, interest emotions such as fascination, boredom, and inspiration are all elicited by an appraisal of challenge combined with promise and all involve an aspect of (a lack of) stimulation (Desmet 2003).

Examining cognitive and affective responses, it can be concluded that the full range of cognitive responses may contribute to the full range of affective responses (Crilly et al. 2004, 553-554). For example aesthetic impressions are directly related to aesthetic emotions, and instrumental emotions may result from aesthetic impressions, semantic interpretations and symbolic associations, if the product is seen to promise the satisfaction of decorative, practical and social objectives (Crilly et al. 2004, 554).

### **2.3.2.3 Behavioral response**

Behavioral response can be divided basically into two: approach or avoidance (Bloch



1997, 20). When a particular product form elicits positive psychological responses, the consumer will tend to engage in approach activities before, during and after the purchase. Consumer may want to spend more time in exploring the product, searching for further information about it, purchasing it and displaying it prominently. When product elicits negative responses the consumer may distance him- or herself from the object and have unwillingness to purchase it. If for example a person has received an unpleasant gift, it might be placed into an outlying place or hidden (Bloch 1997).

When one considers response formation to fashion one important stage when consumers are forming perception of a particular style is when the style is new. Cholachatpinyo et al. (2002a) have divided consumer response in the case of fashion change into four categories depending on the positive or negative cognitive and behavior. When a particular new style elicits positive psychological interest and positive involvement, consumer accepts the new style and dresses according to dominant social norms. When the new style elicits negative responses and no involvement to purchase it, people wish to behave and express their feelings just in the opposite way in order to resist the evolving norms (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002a). This anti-conformity can be seen as an alternative dressing behavior. The third case is occurring when people have positive interest towards new style and change but their behavior is negative. People notice the change but behave in very conservative way in their choices. These people's way of living and dressing respectively change very slowly and imperceptibly. Finally the behavioral response can be positive even though the cognitive interest is negative. They need to engage themselves in change but they do it in a modified way. Their behavior is to adapt into the new social direction but in a new semi-influenced way.

### **2.3.3 Perceptual judgments**

One important aspect of consumer interpretation is perceptual inferences. Inferences are interpretations that go beyond the information given. Perceptual judgments begin with selective attention to perceptual stimuli. As described before, not all stimuli are processed due to the large amount of stimuli consumers face daily. Through selective exposure and attention, consumers form basic images of brands, products and marketing communications (Arnould et al. 2004). Through learning and experience consumers eventually form summary perceptual judgments that link the sensory stimuli to

outcomes they consider probable (Arnould et al. 2004). Perceptions of brand and product-country image are examples of perceptual inferences, and they are fundamental in a global marketplace. Fashion brands may be very significant to consumers and they frequently use brand name as gestalt cue. Consumers may be less ashamed to admit the importance of brands than previously, but they are less committed to any one brand over a longer period (Arnould et al. 2004). The fashion industry is trying to compensate for this by over-exposing their brands, putting the brand name very conspicuously all over clothing, bags, accessories etc. in order to get a maximum of exposure out of each catch (Solomon et al. 2002). Even though the focus in this study is to explore clothing design perception, we cannot exclude brand image out of the investigation due to its centrality in clothing and fashion business.

### **2.3.3.1 Brand image**

Communications Manager of a European fashion retail house:

*Fashion is all about self image, and using products, but more often, brands, as symbols which say something about what you are, or probably more of what you would want to be. Every successful fashion brand is based upon an image* (Moore et al. 2000, 932).

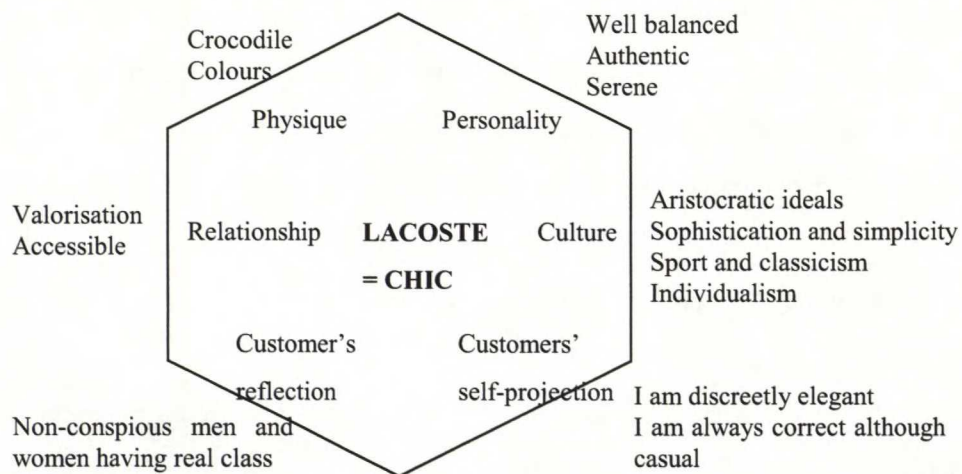
Brand image is the consumer's perception of a brand, product, company or retailer (Kapferer 2004; Nandan 2004). Brand identity is thus then how the company or brand strategists want the brand to be perceived. The communication of brand identity follows the same laws as the Shannon's (1948) basic model of communication, which distinguishes between the sender, the media and the receiver. Brand identity is related to the sender's side of communication whereas image is on the receiver's side. Brand identity is not always equivalent to brand image, because there might be gaps in the communication process, external factors ("noise"), and discrepancy between the encoding and decoding (Nandan 2005). The brand meaning interpretations differ depending on the context in which the interpretation takes place. In particular, meanings are perceived differently in different cultures (Aaker 1997; Karjalainen 2004; Kawabata & Rabolt 1999). National culture and regional socioeconomic characters affect on consumer needs and brand image perception (Roth 1995). For example in individualistic countries consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are different from the members of their in-group. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are similar to members of their in-group



(Aaker 1997, 355). In a study conducted by Kawabata & Rabolt (1999) Japanese students considered that brand names and designer brands represent fashion while in the USA the students bought inexpensive, mass-marketed fashionable clothing. This demonstrates that the symbolic or self-expressive use of brands is robust across cultures, while the nature of that self-expression differs significantly.

Ko et al. (2007) identified four cross-national market segments for fashion industry that cut across countries and respond differently to advertising messages. The segments are labeled as follows: "information seekers", "sensation seekers", "utilitarian consumers" and "conspicuous consumers". Their findings also reveal that fashion lifestyle segment had a stronger effect on the reaction to a set of three ads (from French, US and Korean Vogue editions) for a major global fashion company than did consumer nationality. Even though their findings support the notion that there is a trend toward a global consumer culture, their results are limited to one global high fashion brand Chanel. In addition Europe was researched as a single homogeneous continent. One could argue that there are vast differences between European countries and nationalities and therefore the generalizations of "European consumers" may be dangerous. However in this context the defined segments can be assumed to be global and to cut across also European countries.

Brand image and product image are two different things. However, when we consider the image of a clothing or fashion design, it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between the actual product image and the brand (manufacturer) image. In developed markets, consumers frequently use brand name as a gestalt cue. That is, the brand name represents a composite of information about product attributes. A brand's perceived quality may exert a positive influence on the perceived value of a retail firm for example (Arnould et al. 2004, 321). Only few products can be imagined without brand connection in today's world. The product is often the strongest manifestation of brand identity, thus not the only one, while it is usually the prior source of through which a brand is evaluated (Kapferer 2004, Karjalainen 2004). Kapferer (2004) defines the brand identity through six facets; *physique*, *personality*, *culture*, *relationship*, *customer reflection* and *self-image*. Through the French sportswear-brand Lacoste we can see all the elements of the brand identity and the associations they evoke (see figure 7.)



**Figure 7. Lacoste identity prism (Kapferer 2004, 112)**

Brand associations are central elements of product identity (Karjalainen 2004, 57). Keller (1993, 4) outlines three dimensions of brand associations: *attributes, benefits and attitudes*. Attributes are distinctive features that characterize a product or service. They can be size, color, weight, brand personality, prize, packaging, and user imagery. Benefits refer to the consumer perception of the needs that are being satisfied (Nandan 2005, 267). Needs can be categorized as symbolic, functional or experiential. Finally brand attitudes are defined as consumers' overall evaluations of a brand (Keller 1993, 4). As presented earlier, attitudes consist of three components: cognitive, affective and conative (Nandan 2005). As one can see, the consumer associations of brands consist of similar components as the consumer response to design. A brand includes more associations than just product design, but the associations consumers' form, follows similar logic. The product design can have a strategic role in the brand identity communication, since the design and design cues can communicate the brand identity. On the other hand the brand is often used as predictive cue for product perception as well (Karjalainen 2004).

### 2.3.3.2 Country of origin

Country of origin image (or country of manufacture) is used by consumers and industrial buyers as a cue to infer beliefs about product attributes. Country-of-origin cues are extrinsic cues which can be conveyed through packaging or national symbols and they can be manipulated without changing the actual product (Arnould et al. 2004). Nike for example has a positive image as a U.S. origin brand but a negative image as a cheap



labor manufacturer. Product-country images (PCI) contain general impressions of countries and idiosyncratic beliefs about a country's products formed through direct or indirect experiences. Consumer's evaluations of country-of-origin are based in part on a match between product and country. PCI's contain widely shared cultural stereotypes, or simplifying categories (Arnould et al. 2004). For example French sounding brands have positive effect on consumers' evaluations of hedonic products.

When it comes to clothing one could question how interested and affected consumers are of the country of origin label, when it is not even required to mark it on the clothing label in many European nations. In general consumers wish for ethically produced clothing but quite often this is not reflected in the buying behavior. For some clothing brands marking country of origin may be a brand and positioning strategy but majority of clothing companies use the advantage of producing cheap and hence selling in lower price.

#### **2.3.4 Context of consumption**

After the consumer perception process, including design elements, consumer response and perceptual judgments on product design have been discussed; there is a need to clarify the macro-level factors which also have an influence on design perception. Bloch's model (1995, 17) (see figure 8) illustrates the consumer response to product design. It is built on the three previously examined consumer responses: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Bloch claims that product form (which is influenced by design goals and constraints) has an impact on cognitive and affective responses, which in turn affect the behavioral responses. Bloch has also incorporated moderating factors in to the model, which influence the psychological and behavioral responses. They are individual tastes and preferences (i.e. innate design preferences, cultural and social context and consumer characteristics) and situational factors.

Crilly et al. (2004) have drawn a slightly different overview of moderating macro factors on consumer response (see appendix 1) than Bloch. Their model includes visual references (stereotypes, similar products, metaphors, characters, conventions and clichés), cultural influences (tastes, trends, fashions and styles) and situational factors (motivation, opportunity, marketing, social setting), which impact the consumer

response. It is enough only to mention that there are also other moderating factors in their communication model. These do not need further investigation because they do not affect the consumer response formation.

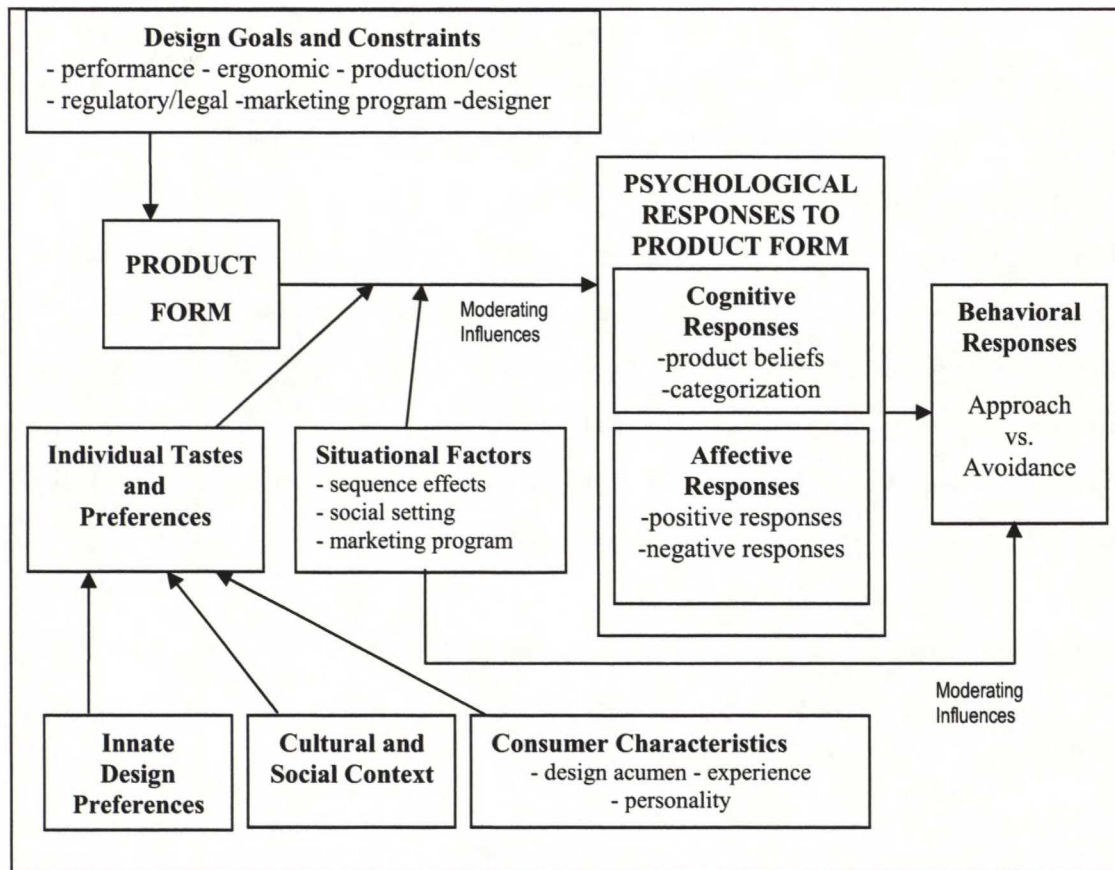


Figure 8. A model of consumer responses to product form (Bloch 1995, 17)

### 2.3.5 Moderating factors on consumer response

Next, basing on the models of Bloch (1997) and Crilly et al. (2004) the main moderating factors, which derive from the context of consumption (or from the cultural environment) and affect the consumer response, are presented in detail.

**Innate design preferences** appear to be innate or are acquired early in life. According to Gestalt theories people inherently refer order, symmetry, unity and harmony among other elements in product design. Thus too much unity in the expense of variety becomes uninteresting, and therefore perspective, novelty and complexity produce arousal (Bloch 1997; Crozier 1994). According to Wundt curve highly simple or highly complex systems result in low preference. The highest preference is reached with an



optimal degree of complexity. Innate design preferences are also tried to explain with a teleological perspective, it is preference for forms which follow natural, organic principles (Bloch 1997, 21). Gestalt and teleological scholars both argue that proportion is particularly significant among innate design preferences. The Golden Section (divine proportion) is the ration based on phi. It results when a line is divided into two line segments, so that the smaller segment is in the same proportion to the larger segment as the larger segment is to the whole (Bloch 1997, 21). Essentially two unequal parts of a whole must be in relationship to each other to create a satisfactory image to the eye. At least since the Renaissance, many artists and architects have proportioned their works to approximate the golden ratio believing this proportion to be aesthetically pleasing. What makes clothing even more complex, is that clothing pieces are worn together, mixing and matching different pieces in order to get one cohesive outcome. When estimating proportion, one needs to look the whole combination of clothing which is worn.

**Visual references** help the consumer to understand the product by comparing it with other living things. Visual references may affect cognitive, affective and behavioral responses. They may for example affect the aesthetic impression by increasing subjective concinnity, which is the extent to which the design appears to make sense to the viewer (see chapter 2.3.2.1 cognitive response). They may also assist in semantic interpretation by allowing the viewer to categorize the product and influence the symbolic associations when connecting the design with other already known forms (Crilly et al. 2004). Similar products and stereotypes help the viewer to categorize the product within its product category. Metaphors allow consumers to understand a new concept more easily. Characters thus assist consumers in understanding designs by allowing them to treat products like humans and engage in the process of personification. Conventions are culturally accepted, and they may be useful in communicating visually correct operation. Finally, products may be regarded as clichés (Coates 2003, 250) when they use the same visual references as many products before. These visual references arise from the context of consumption but they are defined by the consumer characteristics.

**Individual consumer characteristics** such as age, gender, personality, experience and design acumen (Bloch 1997; Crilly et al. 2004) also influence consumer response. When

it comes to clothing and fashion design studies especially age and gender have been interesting topics for scholars and there are findings on how age and gender affect clothing preferences. This thesis does not however focus on these micro level aspects, but on macro level aspects which are presented next.

Design preferences are also shaped by **cultural and social influences** (Bloch 1997; Crilly et al. 2004; Crozier 1994; Jordan 2000; McCracken 1986; Rubinstein 1995) which often differ across cultures. In the following the most typical and often mentioned moderating factors on the consumer response are presented. Countries have ingrained cultural characteristics and values that influence the extent to which certain design characteristics are appreciated. Values and norms are deeply rooted in the culture and they affect how particular style is accepted by a culture or subculture (Bloch 1997; Kim & Farrell-Beck 2005). Cultural conventions of taste may define what is preferred design or style and which materials are to be valued. (Crilly et al. 2004) Transient styles and fashions (Zeitgeist) and general trends shape individual's preference for particular clothing style or design (Crilly et al. 2004; Bloch 1997; Kim & Farrell-Beck 2005). As presented in the chapter 2.2, fashion can spread in three different ways, and the innovation adaptation curve defines how fast the mass-market adopts a new style. Cultural gatekeepers or innovators are in essential role in the fashion diffusion process. The designer's role is to consider semiotic options in the design and reflect the contemporary fashions and trends in the design, which communicate desirable meanings within a particular culture. Ethnic subcultures and other subcultures as well as social class shape the design perception in a matter of socialization of taste. According to Sproles (1979) the styling currently fashionable in the consumer's immediate social environment becomes the most critical characteristic of consumer choice. Also region can be an influencing factor in the design taste. (Bloch 1997) Especially in clothing the climate in a geographic area affects highly the consumer response.

Since the research of the moderating socio-cultural factors on design perception is vague and scholars have basically only agreed on the moderating effect of it, a comprehensive examination of them needs to be conducted. Also the cross-cultural differences and similarities need to be outlined, and therefore the socio-cultural factors are examined from that point of view in the following chapter.



### 3 SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

This chapter discusses the factors in the macro social environment that have a moderating impact on design and clothing perception across cultures. The aim is to outline similarities and differences in cultures and to investigate whether these factors have an influence on fashion perception. In the marketing literature there is an agreement that culture greatly influences how consumers perceive and behave (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002; McCracken 1986). The focus in this part is on macro social environment which refers to the indirect and vicarious social interactions among very large groups of people.

The most widely used variable to compare countries is national wealth (GNP/capita), but as national wealth converges, it doesn't explain differences in consumer behavior across cultures. Many researchers expect increasing convergence of income, media and technology to lead to homogenization of consumer needs and wants. This assumption is thus regarded as unrealistic awhile it places consumers outside of a cultural context (McCracken 1986; De Mooij & Hofstede 2002; Priest 2005). As consumer incomes converge across countries, the manifestation of value and cultural differences will become stronger. Globalization is said to lead to one uniform, undifferentiated global identity. This is quite the opposite; regional and national identities are currently appreciated as never before (Polhemus 2006). One can argue that national identities are downright absurd ridiculous clichés which most of people reject on a conscious level (Polhemus 2006, 265). However, they are shaping people's lives on unconscious level and it is virtually impossible to isolate oneself from their influence.

Marketing researchers have studied previously three major macro social environments – culture, subculture and social class - that have broad and powerful influences on the values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of individual consumers in those groups (Peter & Olson 2005, 266). In clothing research, Pedersen (1991) defines variables from cultural patterns and social institutions, which influence form and function. She divides socio-culture into social structures, technological system and ideational system, which influence dress. The first one comprises of economic, family, political and religious system as well as laws and values. The second component,

technological system, relates to production technologies and energy resources. One can question the relevancy of this second component in current global clothing retail, in which a nation is no longer fully dependent on own resources, thus open markets enable international competition in clothing sector. The third component consists of values, beliefs norms and standards.

Socio-cultural values seem to be especially important factors for this research since they define the most important cultural meanings. They denote strong underlying convictions many people in a group or in society hold and often they are often classifiers of class, religion, race, ethnic background etc. The socio-cultural values that live in a society or community, and are expressed in its institutional settings, may change over time, but are likely to be persistent. Second, literature has noticed the impact of lifestyles and subcultures within a culture; they appear to be also necessary for this work. Socio-cultural factors still exist but these conditions of birth are no longer adequate in describing and classifying identity. This chapter begins with introducing culture and cultural meaning. It will be followed by discussion of cultural values, subcultures and lifestyles.

### **3.1 Culture**

*Culture is the prism through which people view products and try to make sense of their own and other people's consumer behavior. It is the interpretation system which people use to understand daily or extraordinary signifying practices* (Solomon et al. 2002, 441-443).

Arnould et al. (2004, 74) define society's culture as dynamic blueprints for action and interpretations that enable a person to operate in a manner acceptable to other members of the culture. Blueprints for action and interpretation are constructed by **cultural categories** (e.g. age, gender, occupation and ethnicity) and **cultural principles** (e.g. values and ideals, norms, beliefs). The former define and organize time, space, nature, the sacred and society, and the latter allow things to be grouped into cultural categories, ranked and interrelated (Arnould et al. 2004). Clothing represents many different cultural categories and principles (Arnould et al. 2004). Clothing in specific is valuable in separating cultural categories of time, space, gender, ethnicity and class. Clothing



denotes certain times (e.g. evening wear and beach wear) and it differentiates between leisure clothes and work clothes (Solomon 2002). Trousers and dresses represent not only gender differences but also cultural principles that distinguish behaviour of these categories of persons. When Western women began wearing business suits, it was a way for them to express the blueprints for action and interpretation associated with the business world - seriousness, authority, efficiency and the like (Arnould et al. 2004, 80-81). Consumer's expressions of likes and dislikes (cultural principles) distinguish both goods and consumers from another. In this way also consumers' are divided into cultural categories (Arnould et al. 2004, 81). For example people dress to meet social roles and therefore different groups of people are easily recognized through stereotypical clothing.

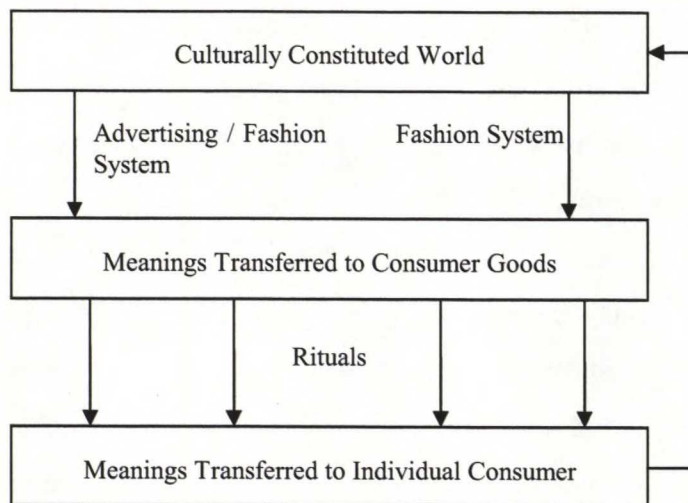
The relationship between consumer behavior and culture is mutual. On the one hand products and services that resonate with priorities of a culture at any given time have a much better chance of being accepted by consumers. Consumer goods provide symbols of meaning and therefore they enable people to act out cultural blueprints when acquiring and using them. On the other hand, the study of new products and innovations in product design successfully produced by culture at any point in time provides a window on the dominant cultural ideals of that period (Solomon et al. 2002). Consumer goods contribute to the construction of the culturally constituted world because they are a visible record of blueprints for action and interpretation (Arnould et al. 2004, 79).

### ***3.2 Cultural meaning***

*Cultural meaning* is relevant in understanding a culture. Culture can be treated as the meanings that are shared by most people in social group. Thus a meaning is cultural, if many people in a social group share the same basic meaning (Peter & Olson 2005, 288-289). Cultural meanings include common affective reactions, typical cognitions, and characteristic patterns of behavior. Each society establishes its own vision of the world and constructs that cultural world by creating and using meanings to represent important cultural distinctions (Peter & Olson 2005). These cultural meanings are created by people in a group through social interaction and they are constantly in change.

Cultural meaning was first introduced by McCracken (1986). In his model cultural

meaning is present in three locations: in the social and physical environments, in products and services, and in individual consumers. There are two ways meaning is transferred in a consumption oriented society. First, marketing strategies are designed to move cultural meanings from the physical and social environments (culturally constituted world) into products and services in an attempt to make them attractive to consumers. Second, consumers actively seek to acquire these cultural meanings in products to establish a desirable personal identity or self-concept (Peter & Olson 2005, 295-296).



**Figure 9. A model of the cultural process (adapted from McCracken 1986 and Peter & Olson 2005)**

The culture in which we live creates the meaning of everyday products and to become resident in consumer goods, meanings must be disengaged from this world and transferred to goods. As discussed previously, the world is constituted by culture through cultural principles and cultural categories, which thus shape the meaning (Arnould et al. 2004). McCracken (1986) analyzes advertising and product design, as practiced in the fashion system, as instruments of meaning transfer. Also other marketing strategies (e.g. pricing) and institutions can be used for meaning transfer (Peter & Olson 2005).

The fashion system takes new styles of clothing or home furnishings and associates them with established cultural categories and principles, moving meaning from the culturally constituted world to the consumer good (McCracken 1986, 76). In a second capacity, the fashion system invents new meanings in a modest way. This is undertaken



by opinion leaders who refine existing cultural meanings and encouraging the reform of cultural categories and principles. Typically these opinion leaders came from higher social classes, but nowadays it is designers, celebrities, movies stars and popular music stars, who are cultural innovators. They are permeable to cultural innovations, changes in style, value and attitude, which they then pass along to the subordinate parties who imitate them (McCracken 1986, 76). Also marginal groups change and spread fashion (see also chapter 2.2.3). Thirdly, the fashion system engages in radical reform of cultural meanings. Some part of cultural meaning of Western industries is always subject to constant and thoroughgoing change (McCracken 1986). The agents who gather up cultural meaning and affect its transfer to consumer goods are product designers, fashion journalist and social observers. Therefore media and in special fashion magazines such as *Vogue* have an increasing role in the spread of fashion.

Consumer goods express cultural meaning but they are likely to vary across different societies and social groups (Peter & Olson 2005). Sometimes the meaning is evident to the consumer and sometimes hidden, and consumers may even manipulate it. The cultural meaning, resident in the consumer good moves into the life of consumer through different forms of rituals, which are symbolic actions performed by consumer to create, affirm, evoke or revise certain cultural meanings (Peter & Olson 2005). Peter & Olson (2005, 300) have defined five consumption related rituals: acquisition, possession, exchange, grooming and divestment that consumers perform to obtain cultural meanings in products. Consumers buy products as a way to acquire cultural meanings to use in establishing their self-identities and self-concepts. Fashion meanings can be used to forge distinctions and to foster a sense of standing out, or they can be used to forge a sense of affiliation with others and to foster an affirming sense of social belonging (Thompson & Haytko 1997, 26). Consumers may use also brands symbolically (Thompson & Haytko 1997) by imbuing brands with human personality traits, as if brands were celebrities or famous historical figures and as they relate to one self (Aaker 1997). Peter & Olson (2005, 303) also suggest further that the meanings consumers acquire can be transferred to the broad cultural environment through people's social behavior and social interaction, when the cultural process is a circle.

Thompson & Haytko (1997) have drawn their model of cultural meaning transfer basing

on the model by McCracken. Their model thus emphasizes more consumer-centered model acknowledging that consumption meanings are not handed down to consumers by cultural intermediaries. They suggest that consumers' appropriation of cultural meanings is a dialogical process in which individuals are continuously engaged in an interpretive dialogue, not only with those in their social spheres but also with the broader socio-cultural history that is encoded in culturally conventional ways of talking about fashion and other distinct domains of consumer culture (Thompson & Haytko 1997, 38).

### ***3.3 Cultural values***

Values are enduring beliefs about desirable outcomes that transcend specific situations and shape one's behaviour (Arnoud et al. 2004; Solomon et al. 2002). Within each culture there is usually a set of underlying goals that most members of that culture agree are important (Solomon et al. 2002, 109). Cultural values are learned, reinforced and modified within subcultures, ethnic groups, social classes and families (Arnoud et al. 2004, 82). Values include instrumental values, i.e. shared beliefs about how people should behave; and terminal values, i.e. desirable life goals or preferred states of being (Arnoud et al. 2004, 82). Norms thus are informal, usually unspoken rules that govern behaviour. Together instrumental and terminal values (goals or needs) represent the most personal consequences people are trying to achieve in their lives. Values affect people's attitudes and opinions and therefore also behaviour. Certain values, core values are central to people's self-concept – their knowledge about themselves. These core values are the key elements in a self schema (an associative network of interrelated knowledge about one self) and they have a major influence on people's cognitive process and choice behaviours (Peter & Olson 2005). Values are also associated to an affect: satisfying a value usually elicits a positive affect. People's general values are reflected in their specific orientations towards dress (Sproles 1979, 145). Those whose values favour aesthetics (beauty and harmony in appearances), personal power seeking (a political value) and status symbolism (display of wealth) have a lot of interest in dress and fashion. People whose values favour economy prefer purchasing traditional and comfortable styles and people and those with high social values (love and concern for others) have been found to be high in orientations toward conformity in dress. Finally, those with high religious values have been found to have a preference for modesty in



dress (Sproles 1979).

Researchers have found considerable cross-cultural differences in levels of these general sets of values. This is one reason why consumers differ from each other across cultures and therefore also there are differences in their consumer behaviour. Next the most often used value measures are presented.

### **3.3.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions**

Hofstede conducted a survey in order to establish a set of dimensions by which national culture could be defined. His study is widely used in business studies. He derived his framework empirically by researching IBM employees in 72 nations and two period of time (1967-1969 and 1971-1973). Hofstede has defined five dimensions of national culture:

- (1) High vs. low power distance. The extent to which people accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally.
- (2) High vs. low uncertainty avoidance. The extent to which people feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.
- (3) Individualism vs. collectivism. Individualism is the extent to which people see themselves as separate from others in society and a preference for a loosely knit social framework. Collectivism is the alternative and it is a preference for a tightly knit social framework in which individuals expect relatives, clan, or other in-group to look after them, in exchange for loyalty.
- (4) Masculinity vs. femininity. Masculinity is a preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success rather than femininity, which is a preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life.

The fifth dimension was added later on, and it is:

- (5) Long term vs. short term orientation. The extent to which people are future or past oriented.

De Mooij has made a comparative survey in which she compared Hofstede's cultural dimensions against data gathered from surveys of consumer behavior and attitudes in

sixteen separate countries (Jordan 2000). On the basis of the outcomes of these correlations, links were made between the five cultural dimensions and people's preferences and tastes with respect to what a product design in the context of car design should communicate through its aesthetics (Jordan 2000, 51-52). Even though car design is not comparable to clothing design, some interesting aspects arise from de Mooij's study.

**Table 1. Links between cultural dimensions and people's preferences**

<b>Cultural dimension</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>
Power distance	High status	Youthfulness
Individuality	Expressiveness	Familiarity
Masculinity	Performance	Artistry
Uncertainty avoidance	Reliability	Novelty
Long-term orientation	Timelessness	Fashionableness

Source: Jordan 2000, 51

In high power distance countries, social consciousness is high and people tend to emphasize the importance of prestige and wealth and to conform to those in their class or in classes they aspire. This implies that brand images are appreciated most in high power distance countries because people are highly motivated by social status and affiliation norms (Roth 1995).

In individualistic cultures consumers are more innovative than consumers in collectivistic cultures. People's desire for fast moving fashion can be seen in the cultures of short-term orientation and individuality. Individualists will frequently become fashion leaders because their motivations and personality - drive for uniqueness, creativity, personal stimulation, self-confidence - naturally favor assuming this innovative role. Collectivist consumers perceive credible brands as better quality and prefer them because they reinforce their belongingness to the group (Erdem et al. 2006). The conformist has a psychological orientation favoring later adoption of established fashions; his motivations favor social acceptance and compliance (Sproles 1979, 151-153). When it comes to brands, in individualistic countries consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are different from the members of their in-group. In



contrast, in collectivistic cultures consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are similar to members of their in-group (Aaker 1997; Roth 1995).

In masculine countries people are more concerned about the performance aspects than in feminine countries. This implies also to the study of luxury brands and expensive clothes, which seem to correlate more with masculinity than femininity (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002). Finally people in high uncertainty countries are focused on risk aversion and problem solving, and will likely prefer functional and reliable brands and products (Jordan 2000; Roth 1995).

Hofstede's dimensions also appear to influence the adoption of innovation, which came out in the study by van Everdingen & Waarts (2003). Higher levels of uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and power distance dimensions in a country negatively influenced Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system adoption, while higher levels of long-term orientation had a significant positive influence (van Everdingen & Waarts 2003, 230). Even though fashion innovation adoption is not equal to IT-based innovation adoption, it is interesting to see whether the results are the same, and whether it is possible to draw generalizations of national innovation adoption across product classes.

### **3.3.2 Hall's cultural classification**

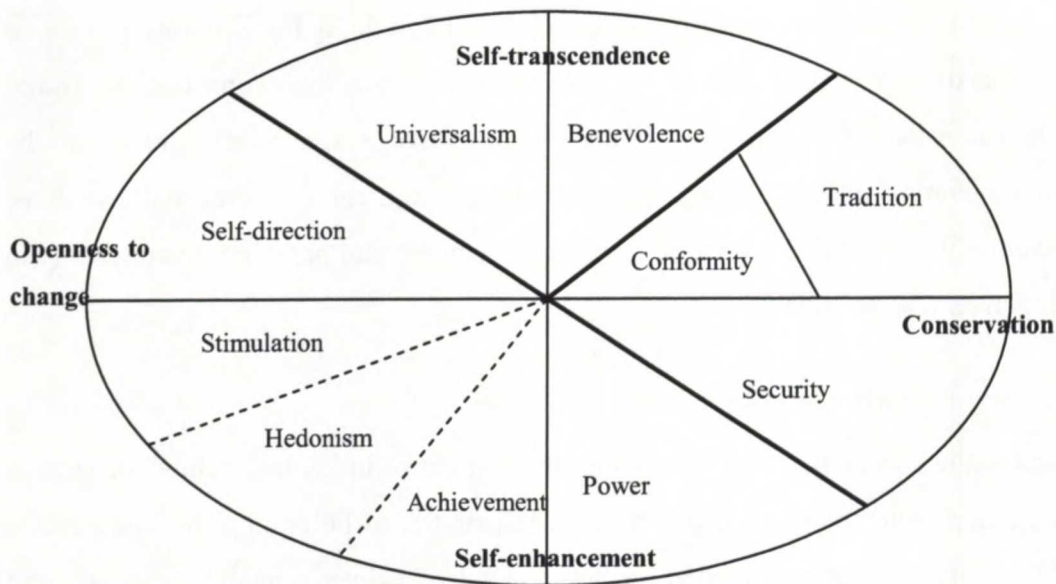
Hall's approach places more emphasis on the communication between cultures. A distinction is made between high and low-context and secondly between monochronic and polychronic cultures. The distinction bases on how messages are communicated within a society, which has been showed to have important implications for the fit between internationally used retail formula and the shopping behavior of people (Waarts & van Everdingen 2006, 648). In high context cultures contextual cues, such as images, are important in the interpretation of a message, while in low-context cultures most of the information is contained explicitly in words. The second distinction, monochronic versus polychronic is based on people's attitude towards time. People in monochronic cultures act in a focused manner, concentrate on one thing at a time, and tend to be well organized and punctual (Waarts & van Everdingen 2006). People in polychronic

cultures tend to be less organized, being less punctual and doing many things at once, in an opportunistic way. Hall's classifications into low- versus high-context cultures and monochronic versus polychronic cultures do also have a significant impact on the country innovation adoption rates. The low-context and monochronic cultures have significantly higher ERP adoption rates than high-context and polychronic cultures (van Everdingen & Waarts 2003, 230).

### **3.3.3 Schwartz value survey**

Schwartz value survey is meant to measure the content of individual values recognized across cultures, and therefore it has been demonstrated to be among the more cross-culturally valid instruments. It is an elaborative set of values, containing 56 different values organized in ten so-called motivational domains. (Solomon 2002) Since individual values reflect an individuals' unique experience (individual level value), as well as normative cultural influence (cultural level value), they can be analyzed at individual and cultural levels. At an individual level, sets of value priorities are said to reveal the trade-offs an individual makes in order to pursue a particular value. That is, respondents emphasize important values, while downplaying less important or opposing values. Schwartz found that individual level values are organized along two basic dimensions, which he termed *conservation* versus *openness to change* and *self-transcendence* versus *self-enhancement*. Within these two dimensions, ten individual values dimensions were identified that represented likely conflicts and compatibility between values. At a cultural level, the mean scores for each value are said to reveal the different solutions that cultures might use to solve universal human problems. Since, individuals and cultures use the values scale differently, Schwartz adjusted raw score of each value dimensions for all countries. He used multidimensional scaling procedures to examine the intercorrelations between the values dimensions and found seven culture level value types (see figure 10).





**Figure 10. The motivational domains of Schwartz value survey (Solomon et al. 2002, 114)**

The value dimensions and their reflection to consumer behavior are presented as follows:

- (1) Conservatism. A society that emphasizes close-knit harmonious relations, the maintenance of status-quo and avoids actions that disturb traditional order. Stimulates interest in products which are traditional, used by others in the same social group and which contribute to orderliness and cleanliness.
- (2) Intellectual autonomy. A society that recognizes individuals as autonomous entities who are entitled to pursue their own intellectual interests and desires. Interest in products which further consumers' creativity and contribute to leisure activities.
- (3) Affective autonomy. A society that recognizes individuals as autonomous entities who are entitled to pursue their stimulation and hedonism interests and desires, and are interested in products which make life enjoyable and varied.
- (4) Hierarchy. A society that emphasizes the authority of hierarchical roles and resource allocation. Stimulates interest in products which communicate status and power.
- (5) Mastery. A society that emphasizes active mastery of the social environment and individual's rights to get ahead of other people. Stimulates desire for new products and for products providing increased control of life.
- (6) Egalitarian commitment. A society that emphasizes the transcendence of selfless interests. Stimulates interest in social aspects of products.
- (7) Harmony. A society that emphasizes harmony with nature. Stimulates interest in

environmental aspects of products, of products which emphasize naturalness and being close to the nature (Peter & Olson 2005; Peter et al. 1999 in Sharafutdinova 2006).

In order to test the generalizability of the cultural framework, Schwartz calculated national value scores for the seven cultural value types. The results obtained were consistent when cross validated against each other. He concluded that the seven value types efficiently capture the relations among national cultures. These seven types can also be summarized into three dimensions, namely:

- (1) Embeddedness versus autonomy
- (2) Hierarchy versus egalitarianism
- (3) Mastery versus harmony

### 3.3.4 Rokeach value survey

Dominant cultural values of society can be measured according to Rokeach Value survey in which consumers rank 36 global values in terms of their importance. The survey includes terminal values, which are desired end-states, and instrumental values, which are composed of actions needed to achieve terminal values.

**Table 2. Rokeach's terminal and instrumental values**

<b>Terminal values:</b>	<b>Instrumental values:</b>
A comfortable life	Ambitious
An exciting life	Broad-minded
A sense of accomplishment	Capable
A world at peace	Cheerful
Equality	Clean
Family security	Courageous
Freedom	Forgiving
Happiness	Helpful
Inner harmony	Honest
Mature love	Imaginative
National security	Independent
Pleasure	Intellectual
Salvation	Logical
Self-respect	Loving
Social recognition	Obedient
True friendship	Polite
Wisdom	Responsible
	Self-controlled

Source: Solomon et al. 2002, 113



### 3.3.5 LOV

Researchers at the University of Michigan Survey Research Center have developed the List of Values (LOV) measure, which includes nine values: sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment, warm relationships with others, self-fulfillment, being well respected, a sense of accomplishment, excitement, security and self-respect (Solomon 2002). LOV approach aims to assess adaptation to various roles through value fulfillment (Arnould et al. 2004). LOV can be used for cross-cultural comparison, but the validity of such instrument is difficult to obtain, since the meaning of values may differ significantly in different cultural contexts (Solomon 2002).

### 3.3.6 Materialism

Materialism has been defined as *the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions* or as *a consumption-based orientation to happiness seeking* (Arnould et al. 2004, 86). It is a multidimensional value including possessiveness, envy (displeasure at someone else possessing something), preservation (a tendency to hang on to things) and non generosity (unwillingness to give or share possessions) (Arnould et al. 2004; Peter & Olson 2005). Researchers have found higher level of materialism in Western cultures, but the consumption focused on experiences, art and aesthetics, because of the social stability of Western societies (Arnould et al. 2004).

Cross-cultural differences have been analyzed in materialism. Arnould et al. (2004) list dimensions along which one can expect to find differences in meaning between cultural areas. Meanings of goods can be contrasted in different cultural contexts. Secondly the identities of goods that are the focus of consumption meanings vary cross-culturally. Also the quantity of meaningful possession in circulation varies. Finally there is likely variation in the stability of consumer meanings. According to the study of Dawson & Bamossy (1990) consumers in the Netherlands had about the same level of general materialism as American consumers. But interestingly, the Dutch consumers were more possessive than the Americans. Whereas U.S. consumers seem to replace old products with new ones fairly readily, the Dutch seem to form stronger relationships with their possessions. It can be concluded that materialism is a consequence of several factors, including such things as social stability, access to information, reference models, as well

as historical developments and cultural values (Solomon et al. 2002, 119).

### **3.3.7 Value Synthesis**

The above discussed cultural value theories overlap in some degree. A synthesis is made by combining the theories so that the components will suit the purpose of this thesis, which is to find out cultural differences in design perception of consumers. The values are divided into 3 components as follows:

(1)

Conservatism, collectivism and high uncertainty avoidance. People feel threatened by ambiguous situations, they subordinate their personal goals to those of a group, they have a tightly knit social network and a need for security and a sense of belonging.

Versus

Intellectual and affective autonomy, individualism and low uncertainty avoidance. A society that recognizes individuals are autonomous entities who are entitled to pursue their own intellectual, stimulation and hedonism interests and desires, self-fulfillment fun and joy, and people see themselves separate from others in the society.

(2)

Hierarchy and high power distance. A society that emphasizes the legitimacy of hierarchical roles and resource allocation and accept that power is distributed unequally.

Versus

Egalitarian commitment and low power distance. A society that emphasizes the transcendence of selfless interests and equal power distribution.

(3)

Mastery, masculinity and materialism. A society that emphasizes active mastery of the social environment and individual's rights to get ahead of other people, material success and heroism.

Versus

Harmony and feminism. People prefer warm relationships, modesty and harmony with nature.



This classification is similar to Schwartz's rough classification of value dimensions. This defined classification will be used for discussing the findings of the empirical research.

### ***3.4 Lifestyles***

Lifestyle suggests a patterned way of life into which consumers fit various products, activities and resources. They are a reflection of individual's attempts to realize a desired or ideal self-concept (Solomon et al. 2002). Lifestyles can be referred as group identities and these groups take their form based on acts of expressive symbolism. Products are the building blocks of lifestyles, and therefore marketers position products and services so that they fit a certain pattern of consumption and lifestyle. Consumers create a personal style in order to ensure they would fit in to a given social setting (Thompson & Haytko 1997). Consumers are often segmented into different lifestyles according to their psychographics – psychological and social psychological factors as values, beliefs and attitudes (Solomon et al. 2002). Lifestyle typologies are interesting ones because they seek to provide a sort of complete sociological view of the market and their segments, but they are too general in character. It is not definite that these general consumer segments would have homogeneous consumption patterns. Also lifestyle typologies usually have weak theoretical foundation, because they are usually developed from the marketers' needs, and due to the large-scale questionnaires the validity and reliability are weak (Solomon et al. 2002). Despite the weaknesses of lifestyle typologies, they are widely used by companies, and two suitable ones for this study are presented.

#### **3.4.1 VALS II**

Values and Lifestyles (VALS 2) is the most well-known and widely used segmentation system in America. The scheme identifies segments of consumers on the basis of the personality traits that drive consumer behavior. The former scheme VALS 1 was based on Maslow's hierarchy of human needs and Reisman's concept of social character (Arnould et al. 2005, 448). It thus was replaced by VALS 2 due to its defaults. VALS 2 classifies people into eight major categories based on whether they control abundant or

minimal resources and three aspects of their basic motivational self-orientations. The eight consumer segments are: Actualizers, Fulfillers, Believers, Achievers, Strivers, Experiencers, Makers and Strugglers (Stone 2004). A person's tendency to consume goods and services extends beyond age, income, and education. Energy, self-confidence, intellectualism, novelty seeking, innovativeness, impulsiveness, leadership, and vanity play a critical role. These personality traits in conjunction with key demographics determine an individual's resources. Consumers are inspired by one of three primary motivations: ideals, achievement, and self-expression. Consumers who are primarily motivated by ideals are guided by knowledge and principles (principle-oriented). Consumers who are primarily motivated by achievement look for products and services that demonstrate success to their peers (status-oriented). Consumers who are primarily motivated by self-expression desire social or physical activity, variety, and risk (action-oriented).

### **3.4.2 Sinus Milieus**

Sinus Milieus is a research conducted by a German research institute Sinus Sociovision. It distinguishes different homogeneous groups of individuals who share the same aspirations in life, the same value systems and the same lifestyles (Trommsdorff 2004). The Sinus Milieus model relies on extensive ethnographic research on people's daily life. The Sinus-Milieus approach is based the observation that differences in daily life shape the individual more than differences in socio-demographic or socio-economic situations. Apparently similar persons (same sex, age, job and revenue) may have really different life contexts when looking into their values, their goals in life, their ways of life and their homes. When individuals share similar life contexts, they are likely to be part of the same milieu. A model is shaped that distinguishes between several milieus; it is then quantitatively validated through a representative sample of the given population (Sinus Sociovision 2007). The model groups people on the base of their basic values (traditionals, mainstream and leading edge) and social status (lower, middle and higher) into social milieus. Thus the opening of markets in the Europe increased the need for international sinus milieus and therefore at the end 1980, the institute provides studies of other European countries. In international comparison there are also groups of people who are similar across West-European countries. These groups of people are similar in



their value base, lifestyle and consumption preferences (Sinus Sociovision 2007). People from different countries within their milieu connect with each other better than with the rest of their countrymen/women.

The Sinus-Milieus study has been approved very significant model and it has been used as a basis for other studies, for example Spiegel publishing company's OUTFIT fashion study (Trommsdorff 2004). The general Sinus Milieus model correlates often badly with product specific behaviour and therefore it makes sense to develop product specific typologies. The OUTFIT study has divided women and men in Germany into seven clothing types according to their clothing consumption behaviour. Feminine clothing types are: old-fashioned, conventionalist, fashion enthusiastic, casual, in need for prestige and non-conformist. The masculine ones are: correct, fashion aware, casual, in need for prestige and individualistic (Trommsdorff 2004, 232).

### ***3.5 Subcultures***

Although country-level factors like national values are important in investigating cultural differences, micro geographic units, that is regions within countries merit investigation as well (Priest 2005; Roth 1995). Subcultures are distinctive groups of people in a society that share common cultural meanings for affective and cognitive responses, behaviors, and environmental factors (Peter & Olson 2005, 321). Subcultures can be categorized by age, religion, race, income level, nationality, gender, family type, occupation, geographic region and community among others.

#### **3.5.1 Socio-economic subcultures**

Social class can be referred to a national status hierarchy by which groups and individuals are distinguished in terms of esteem and prestige (Peter & Olson 2005, 339). Identification with each social class is influenced most strongly by one's level of education and occupation (including income as a measure of work success), but social class is also affected by social skills, status aspirations, community participation, family history, cultural level, recreational habits, physical appearance, and social acceptance by a particular class (Peter & Olson 2005). Traditionally social classes are divided into three main class-based segments: upper class, middle class, and lower class, but finer

segmentation also occur. The Nordic class model has these three segments; upper, middle and lower class. Characteristics for this model are that the middle class is by far the largest segment and the lower and upper class form only minor parts of the population. The Euro-American model has thus six segments in which the middle class is scattered into three and the upper class into two parts (Arnould et al. 2004). A main characteristic of different social classes is that they tend to hold different values from other social classes. Lower classes are described as valuing family and friendship more. Middle-class consumers tend to focus more on individualism, achievement, self-accomplishment and social recognition. Finally, higher social classes find social engagement and self-expression more important.

However, lower-class consumers consume now many of the same goods and participate in many of the same activities as higher-class consumers, and sources of fashion may spread from lower income class into higher class groupings. Therefore it is useful to focus on *how* people consume in different social and economical segments, rather than what they consume. Segment preferences are structured by economic, social and cultural capital, which Bourdieu (1984) calls *symbolic capital*, which people draw on when competing for status. Economic capital means financial resources, social capital includes relationships, social networks etc. and cultural capital consists of specialized knowledge about how to get along in a given consumption context (Arnould et al. 2004). Cultural capital can be person's unspoken knowledge and skills, possession of good taste, access to higher-status consumer goods and objects and degrees, diplomas and memberships that certify certain valued qualities (Arnould et al. 2004, 478). Knowledge of specialized consumption domains, such as knowledge of design history, develops in part through informal learning and socialization. Lately there has been a heightened emphasis on status-oriented consumption globally, that is behavior involving competition for symbolic capital often associated with status symbols (Arnould et al. 2004, 479). One's symbolic capital subtly and pervasively influences the extent to which one can feel at home in a given social setting. Fashion is one of symbolic capital's most tangible and potentially controllable dimensions (Thompson & Haytko 1997, 29). Consumer status symbols vary internationally, and lower social status groups consume differently than upper social status groups. It has been studied that in low regional socioeconomics functional brand images perform well, when high regional



socioeconomics prefer social (affiliation and group membership) and sensory (novelty) brand images, because the consumers have a wide exposure and easy access to Western consumer culture through media and mobility (Roth 1995).

When it comes to fashion and clothing, which satisfies needs related to lifestyle expressions, social class can be one segmenting variable. Brand loyalty is also related to class. Displaying branded products helps newly middle and wealthy classes signal upward social mobility (Arnould et al 2004, 486). One could claim that there are differences in the status-oriented dressing among cultures. On the one hand Western countries have high brand knowledge, which would imply high usage of branded products, but on the other hand in Western countries which have very equal income distribution (Nordic countries) people don't tend to show their wealth through status symbols.

### **3.5.2 Ethnic subcultures**

Ethnicity is defined in terms of frequent patterns of association and identification with common national or cultural origins of a subgroup found within the larger society (Arnould et al. 2004, 494). Acculturation refers to the process by which members of a distinct culture internalize the values behavioral and consumption patterns of a majority society but are not admitted to intimate groupings (Arnould et al. 2004; Kaiser 1990). Assimilation encompasses the process by which individuals in a culture or subculture are accepted into major social institutions and more personal groupings. Acculturation and assimilation continue to take place within many societies, as individuals of diverse cultural heritages introduce aesthetic codes and ideologies (Kaiser 1990, 536). Kaiser (1990) argues, that acculturation and assimilation continue on a worldwide base, as processes of imitation and differentiation become international means of sorting out meaning in the postmodern global context. Fashion worn by ethnic groups is having a trickle-up effect by influencing the mainstream western fashions.

When social class is based on economic capital, ethnicity is based more on social capital and then elaborated through economic and cultural capital expressed in consumption (Arnould et al. 2004). Cultural identity is one of the many forms of identity that individuals express through clothing. Ethnic groups may be recognized for particular

style stylishness in general. Since style is a shared set of preferences, it is a way for ethnic groups whose social status is primarily based on social capital to transform it into symbolic capital (Arnould et al. 2004, 500). Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer (2005) found in their study of Asian-Indians in the USA, that a low level of acculturation process did result in a higher level of involvement in Indian ethnic apparel. Thus, they also found that consumers who were less acculturated to western culture were less involved in ethnic apparel but became increasingly involved as they became increasingly acculturated to the US culture. Assessment of ethnic identity needs to take into account the global context and worldwide fashion influence of root cultures today. Appearance contexts are constructed and visually negotiated on an individual and interpersonal level, and they derive their meaning as a function of social constructions in specific contexts, all within a cultural as well as a larger global context (Kaiser 1990, 537-538).

### **3.5.3 Regional subcultures**

Consumer culture and consumer's lifestyles vary geographically, or by region. These reasons include climatic and topography, ethnic history, local customs and the distribution of jobs and industries (Arnould et al. 2004; Solomon et al. 2002). Geodemography combines data on consumer expenditures and other socio-economic factors with geographic information about the areas in which people live. Basic assumption is that people who have similar needs and tastes tend to live near one another (Solomon et al. 2002, 526-527). Greenwood & Murphy (1978, 73-74) have observed differences in the fashion style and clothing in the USA between Los Angeles, Dallas and New York. They conclude that there are major differences in the environment and culture of the cities, which impact on how people dress. New York market is innovative in philosophy and sophisticated in execution and design. Los Angeles market is youthful, innovative, casual, radical and vital. Dallas is thus moderate-priced, big and flamboyant. Therefore the innovative high fashion jumps from coast to coast (New York and Los Angeles) and only when it appears to be accepted style, it filters into Middle America. It can be questioned if in the fashion-oriented cities people dress alike. Rubinstein claims that the image of fashion clothing and its meaning are likely to remain essentially the same. Because of the different traditions, and climatic conditions, however, fashionable clothing in New York may have a slightly different manifestation than that in Paris, London or Milan (Rubinstein 1995, 237).



### **3.5.4 Age Subcultures**

Age groups usually have distinctive values and behaviors. However, many consumers think of themselves as 10 to 15 years younger than they really are (Peter & Olson 2005, 326). Thus their behaviors, affect and cognitions are more related to their psychological age than to their chronological age. People's preferences and their access to resources change with physical aging. Also age-related life transitions (socially recognized changes in status) drive demand for specialized products and services. Age cohorts share experiences and memories from specific time, and these form the basis of shared values and cultural symbolism, which in turn translates into similarities in consumer preferences (Arnould et al. 2004). Age also influences the importance of product characteristics on apparel purchases. Lifestyle differences associated with distinctive values and cultural symbolism of particular age cohorts are useful in segmentation and positioning of clothing and fashion.

Studies about the age in fashion consumption across cultures reveal that demand for clothing and accessories as well as the image and styling of apparel tend to be stronger among younger age groups than older ones in the Western cultures (Hyllegard et al. 2005; Rocha et al. 2005). Younger people also tend to be more accepting of new brands and may be less loyal to local retailers. The country of origin was more important to older consumers than to younger ones.

Marketers usually distinguish between three age groups: the teen market, Baby Boomers and the mature market. The teen market has been of great interest for marketers because they have enormous discretionary purchasing power. Second, they are used of marketing actions and involved in consumer culture. Teenagers use brands and advertisements to craft and comment on their lives and communities. In addition many people form initial brand loyalties as teenagers. Studies have found out that girls tend to be conformist in their orientation to fashion trends. Teenagers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence is positively related to sensitivity to the display aspects of clothing (Arnould et al. 2004, Grant & Stephen 2005). This helps to explain their tendency to conform to peers' dress codes, and the value to them of brands with clear meanings shared by their peer group. Further, teenagers are prepared to pay a premium of a branded product (Grant & Stephen 2005).

The population is aging in Western nations. For example in Finland the percentage of over 65-year old people from the nation's population was 15 %, but in 2030 it will be 26,3 %. Aging consumers will be differently endowed with cultural capital and better educated than in the past. The over-50 group own three-quarters of all financial assets, accounts for half of all discretionary spending power in Triad countries and their consumption power (Arnould et al. 2004, 508). Birtwistle & Tsim (2005) have studied this important consumer group's (female consumers aged over 45) fashion clothing purchase and shopping behavior in United Kingdom. First of all this market can be segmented using cognitive rather than chronological age. Second, mature women continue to be fashion conscious, they see themselves in the same light as they did when they were young, want to keep looking and feeling good and are looking for clothes designed with fashion edge to suit their body shape (Birtwistle & Tsim 2005, 462).

### **3.5.5 Gender Subcultures**

Gender is the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time and the cultural capital associated with a set of gender roles (Arnould et al. 2004, 511). Evident physiological differences between men and women lead to specialized product needs in clothing for example.

Differences in psychological traits, attitudes, norms and behavior are often associated with gender identity. Independence, assertiveness and competitiveness are associated with masculinity when caring, understanding, nurturance and intuition are associated with femininity. Research shows that gender identity may fluctuate in different purchase and consumption situations and may vary with the degree to which a purchase and consumption situation evokes a culturally conditioned gender response (Arnould et al. 2004). Gender roles are learned early and they affect consumption. Masculinity is associated with instrumental and femininity with an expressive orientation. Men emphasize the functional benefits of clothing and women emphasize social concerns. What constitutes stereotypically masculine or feminine roles varies across cultures and segments (Arnould et al. 2004). These roles are thus in change, which can be seen reflected in contemporary advertisements.



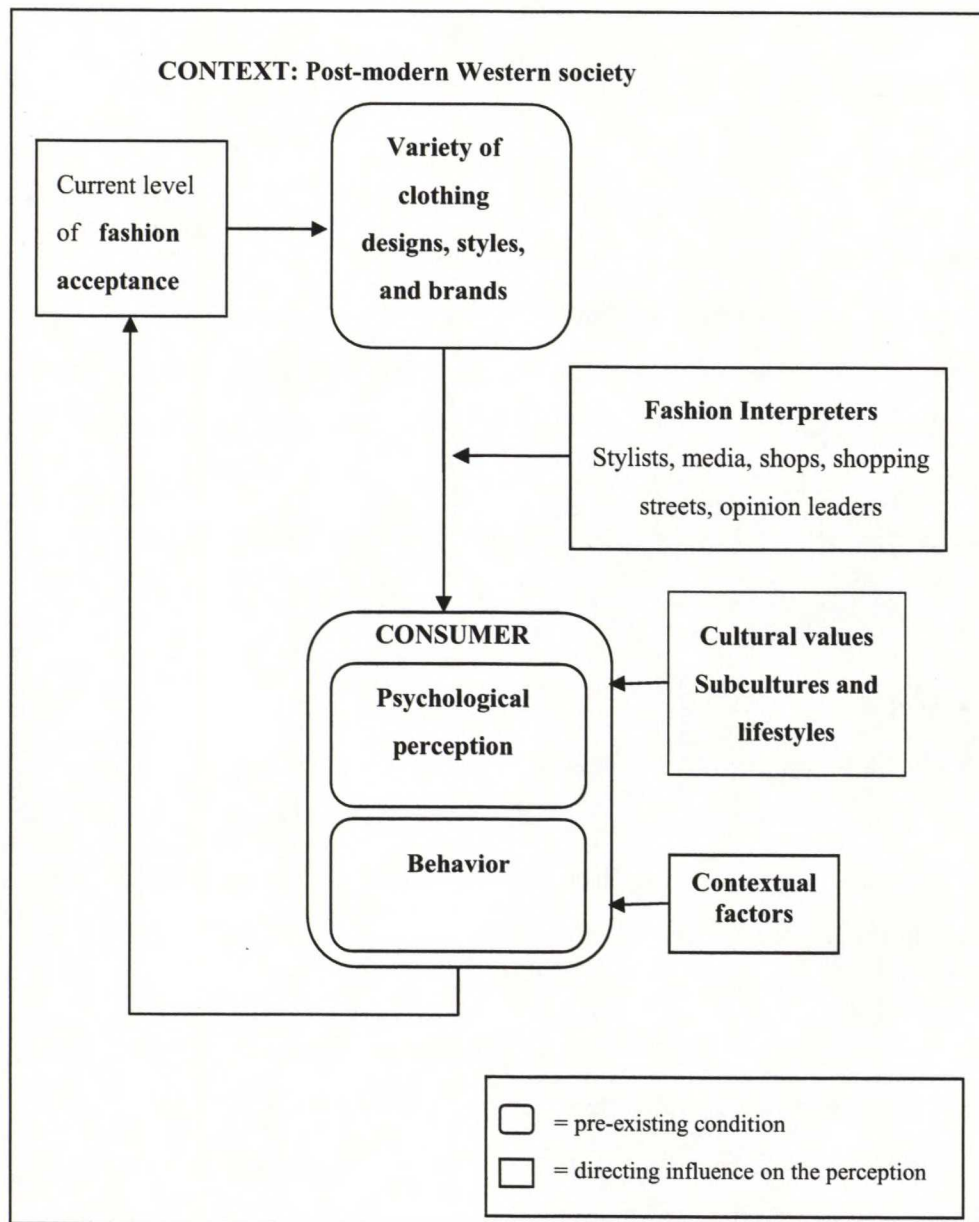
## **4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD OF RESEARCH**

### ***4.1 Framework for the study***

The literature review presented in chapters 2 and 3 aimed to give the reader a broad view on the research topic. In general one can conclude that consumer behavior of clothing and fashion is influenced by many interacting variables. The theoretical framework of this thesis integrates fashion concepts and consumer behavior theories into a broad framework for analyzing the impact of socio-cultural factors on clothing design perception.

The theoretical framework (figure 11) shows the main elements of the variables that influence consumer preference for clothing and fashions across cultures. The macro environment in this case is Western post-modern society. If one views the framework from top to down, the first square represents the clothing design and brand. First critical influencer on the consumer's perception formation is the current level of acceptance of the style which sets the stage for the consumer perception process. The acceptance can be low, medium or high. The level of acceptance determines how much public visibility the style has. The consumer is aware of the level in the beginning of the perception formation, and depending on whether the consumer is a fashion innovator or a fashion adopter, he/she will either reject or accept it.

This object has an identity, which is communicated in the form of the clothing, design, materials, designer, brand name, values and other verbal and visual messages. In this communication process there are thus the fashion interpreters (as discussed in chapter 2), that have a major impact on how particular clothing or style is perceived by the consumers. They also advise on consumers what to wear and what is in fashion. The fashion system uses culture for creating meanings in clothing and fashion. Clothing design and brands get their cultural meaning through the fashion system and the culture in which they occur. However, if the fashion design and the designer have different cultural environment, the message and meaning of the design may not transmit to the consumers the same way. Therefore it is crucial to define the culture but also the fashion system of the national country, before targeting products for the consumers.



**Figure 11. Theoretical framework**

The consumers form a psychological perception of the object, which in branding is called an image. In the postmodern consumer society consumers buy clothing and fashion which has a meaning for them. The meaning is interpreted by the fashion system to the consumer and created in the social environment. If the fashion design or brand does not reflect the meaning the consumer wants, it may not be purchased. However there are socio-cultural factors which framework consumers' behavior. These factors were discussed in chapter 3. Cultural values, subcultures and lifestyle shape the consumer perception. Each social environment creates cultural meaning i.e. a vision of the world by creating and using meanings to represent important cultural distinctions.



Finally there are some situational and contextual factors which may have an influence on the consumer behavior.

The framework presented in figure 11 is used for conducting the empirical research. The aim of this thesis is to study culture and cultural meaning at the macro level of two national cultures, Finland and the Netherlands. However, because culture is the meanings shared among a group of people (of any size) this study analyzes the cultural meanings of smaller subcultures and social classes as well. The empirical research aims to reveal the framing variables for consumer perception to clothing and to find out the culture specific factors. The findings obtained from the research are analyzed further to find out if the suggested framework is valid.

#### ***4.2 Research Method***

Since there are only few studies done related to the socio-cultural effects on clothing design perception, the nature of this research is explorative. The research method which is the most suitable for explorative studies is qualitative. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 3). The attempt is to get a better understanding of the research subject by deploying a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices. However, each practice makes the world visible in a different way and consequently researchers frequently use more than one interpretive practice in one study.

Qualitative methods in general are effective when the researcher needs first hand behavioral information, and when the goal is understanding behavior in its social and cultural context (Boynton-Arthur 1993, 142). In comparison to quantitative study, qualitative study provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena. In specific, research into symbolic behavior reflected in dress is best accomplished through qualitative methods, as these methods are concerned with data of great depth. The meaning of dress for the wearer and the observer may be different and it may be altered as context changes. Establishing some generalizations about the effects of specific dress

cues may be difficult and of limited value due to their dependence upon social and societal contexts and the dynamic fashion-related nature of dress (Loker 1993, 148). In addition, dress is used for symbolic associations in a first-impression situation due to its visual character and because it may be the only information one has about a person. Therefore the assumptions of qualitative research accommodate the study of the socio-cultural aspects of dress.

The impact of socio-cultural factors is studied by comparing Finland and the Netherlands. Therefore this study is cross-cultural and comparative. Typically cross-cultural research studies examine particular issues or phenomena in two or more countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings (institutions, customs, traditions, value systems, lifestyles, languages, thought patterns). The aim for conducting cross-cultural study is to seek explanations for similarities and differences, to generalize from them and to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in two different national contexts. When two countries are used, the study is comparative in nature, but one country may be much larger and more diverse than the other. This may be a problem because of the very different circumstances facing the two countries (Peterson 2004, 29). One rarely finds any detailed treatment of the cross-cultural literature as a prelude to why the researchers expected that their results for one country should be different from another. In addition little is said about how different political or economic systems may lead to cross-cultural differences (Peterson 2004). By choosing two European countries Finland and the Netherlands, which are culturally similar nations (Waarts & van Everdingen 2006) and do not have vast size difference, one can get more reasonable analysis of the cross-cultural similarities and differences. One could argue that because Finland and the Netherlands share Eurocentric perspectives and similar values, it is not necessary to study their cultural norms and behaviors. One could expect the results to be the same in both countries. On the other hand, despite of converging economic systems in the Europe, there is evidence of diverge consumer behavior. Diverging versus converging markets are a matter for investigation in cross-cultural research, and it is going to be issued in this thesis.



Cross-national comparisons - which are common in economics and the policy sciences and focus on variables such as gross-national product, sales and turnover - are presumably being objective measures that need no cross-cultural translation. Quantitative measures are used in this study to understand the market structure but the differences in preferences and meanings are not best revealed with objective measures. Therefore qualitative methods are used to get a holistic view on the topic.

The research has also some aspects of ethnography, which is based on observational work in particular cultural context (Boynton-Arthur 1993, Silverman 2000). Ethnography refers to social scientific writing about particular folks. The origins of ethnography are in the work of nineteenth-century anthropologists who wanted to understand a group of people and traveled to observe different pre-industrial cultures. Ethnography nowadays does not necessarily include active observation but researchers may work only with cultural artifacts like texts and recording they did not observe beforehand. Observation is however fundamental in understanding another culture. In a sense all social research is a form of participant observation, because we cannot study the social world without being part of it (Silverman 2001, 45). Some contemporary researchers think that in order to understand the world firsthand, you must participate yourself rather than observe people at distance. By using this method one can develop a portrait and establish cultural rules of the culture sharing group. This method suits well when gathering information on subcultures and lifestyles of people. One can increase the cultural sensitivity of the work and can learn more about the macro level of society. Therefore these benefits of ethnography are directly applicable to the increasingly global nature of the clothing and textiles field (Boynton-Arthur 1993). The fieldwork, which is normal for ethnography, takes usually from six months to one year. In this study the observation of both countries took about seven months and was focused on subcultures and lifestyle groups.

#### ***4.3 Implementation***

The inquiry approaches for qualitative research in this thesis are in-depth interviews and observation. In the personal in-depth interviews the information is probed through open ended questions. Depth interviews are the best method for in-depth probing of personal opinions, beliefs, and values and are very rich in information. Due to the complexity of

fashion business, it was decided to interview experts and professionals in the fashion and clothing business in the focus countries. It was supposed that majority of consumers would not have knowledge and awareness of their own perception formation and behavior. Clothing perception and the influence of marketing, peer groups and other cultural factors is often unconscious to the respondent, and therefore consumers may not be aware of all the influences they are affected by. Therefore the people who were selected for the interviews were fashion industry professionals working close to the consumers in the fashion or clothing business, and therefore they were believed to have the best knowledge of the consumer behavior and clothing preferences in both countries. The interviews consisted of fashion, consumer behavior and trend professionals (designers, stylists, fashion organizations and market research companies), clothing retailers and (academic) researchers from different disciplines (design, marketing, sociology). The aim was to get views from different angles and compare them to each other in order to get a cohesive picture of the market and its different players. This cohesive sample cannot be though considered as representative of the national sample. This makes any national generalization questionable (Peterson 2004). In order to increase the generalization of the results, the interviewees were selected so that there would exist a counterpart in Finland who is working for a similar kind of an organization and for a similar kind of a position. It was noticed in both countries, that it was difficult or even impossible to get managers from the leading international fashion retailers into interviews due to competitive and strategic reasons. This study would have benefited from their perspective but due to their market leader position, these retailers are very well studied by fashion industry professionals, and their way of conducting business is a reference point for other retailers. However, other interviewed professionals were able to characterize the retailer business thoroughly, which compensates the lack of the international fashion retailer interviews.

The interviewing started in November 2007 in the Netherlands and ended in March 2008 in Finland. Altogether 21 interviews were conducted in order to reach different expert views on the subject (see Appendix 2 for the list of interviewed people). The in-depth interviews were personally conducted in the countries in question and in one case the respondent answered to the questions in writing with electronic mail. All the interviews were recorded, in order to enhance the quality of discussion and accuracy of



the answers. The interviews took from 45 to 90 minutes. In the beginning a pilot interview was conducted after which the interview questions were slightly changed. The final questions were loosely structured, which enables free discussion, small influence of the interviewer and the interviewee could answer in detail in questions of his or her specialization area. The interview questions were structured according to the theoretical framework illustrated in the beginning of this chapter (see Appendix 3 for the list of interview questions).

The questions usually started with *how* questions which were followed by *why* questions. The first question was an opening question to get into the topic and additional more specific questions were made afterwards. In many cases the question structure was not followed. Also the discussion varied according to the interviewees' expertise and interest. The interviews were conducted in Finnish for Finnish speaking people and in English in other interviews. Even though the interviews with Dutch speaking respondents could not be conducted in their mother tongue, English was not perceived problematic in this case. Dutch people have in general an excellent level of English and this was not seen to bias the quality of the answers.

In addition to the primary data, a great amount of secondary data such as magazines, news, books, articles and active observation of the environment in the representative countries enabled deeper understanding of the subject and research problem. Also discussion with people and specific subgroups in both countries gave an ethnographic aspect in the research. The observations of people in the Netherlands and Finland helped to get a reference point into the discussions held with the interviewees.

In qualitative research the aim is to create new concepts and theory by blending together empirical evidence and abstract concepts (Neuman 2000). The data analysis and interpretation started immediately after first interview. The process was as follows: all the interviews were recorded, and afterwards transcribed, leaving already all irrelevant information out. The interviews were developed into a description, reflected with the findings done in previous researches. Then the data was analyzed for themes and an interpretation of the meaning of the collected information was done. The coded transcripts were first analyzed within each national culture separately and then

compared to each other. The accuracy of respondents' answers was checked by triangulating it to other data. The conceptualization in this qualitative research was conducted by organizing data into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. Concepts from the theoretical framework were reflected into the data and new concepts were developed, conceptual definitions were formulated and the relationship among concepts was examined. Eventually the concepts were linked to each other in terms of sequence, as oppositional sets of similar categories that were interweaved into theoretical statements. Concept formation began already during the secondary data collection and after the primary data collection the theoretical framework was improved.

#### ***4.4 Reliability and Validity***

Qualitative research in specific is often judged by whether it produces valid knowledge due to its nature and characteristics. A science is credible to the extent that it uses appropriate methods and is rigorous, critical and objective in its handling of data (Silverman 2001). Qualitative research can be made credible if the researcher makes every effort to falsify his initial assumptions about the data. When assessing the credibility of this research reliability, validity and generalizability are discussed next.

Reliability means that the method of conducting a study or the results from it can be replicated or reproduced by other researchers (Silverman 2000). When assessing reliability in qualitative research it is important whether the study is consistent over time. One difficulty in consistency is that the process which is being studied is not stable over time. It is thus accepted that often in qualitative study the replication of results is difficult and that different researches result in different results. High reliability in qualitative research is associated with low-inference descriptors (Silverman 2001, 226). When observing people consistent and concrete recording of observations is important. It should include verbatim accounts of what people say rather than researcher's reconstructions of the general sense of what a person said. Therefore all the interviews were recorded and afterwards carefully transcribed. It was also made sure that each interview respondent understood the questions the same way.

With validity it is meant external and internal validity. The former means that there are no errors internal to the design of the research project; it is the degree to which findings



correctly map the phenomenon in question. The latter means the ability to generalize findings from the specific setting the research occurred to other similar settings and people (Neuman 2000, Silverman 2000). One of major problems in qualitative research is the high probability of researcher's bias when gathering and interpreting the information. Validity is thus said to be high in specific in ethnographic methods when compared to surveys and experiments (Boynton-Arthur 1993). A key feature of ethnographic analysis is the awareness of researchers that their own ethnocentrism could bias the collection of data and have an impact on the validity of the study when interpreting the data especially when doing research in cultures different from own (Boynton-Arthur 1993). Also the accuracy of respondents' answers must be checked constantly. In order to ensure accuracy of the study it was used methodological triangulation for collecting data and analyzing the results. The idea behind triangulation is that the more agreement of different data sources there is on a particular issue, the more reliable the interpretation of the data is. In triangulation several methods of research are used in order to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Peterson 2004). In this research interviews and observation were used for gathering data and interpreting it. When having a cumulative view of data drawn from different contexts, one is able to triangulate the "true" state of affairs by examining where the different data intersect (Silverman 2000, 98). Thus there are some limitations with triangulation which need to be taken account. In research literature, it is argued that triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Adopting multiple methods may lead into under-analyzed data or an imprecise or theoretically indigestible research problem. In addition, a researcher may seek to overcome the context-boundedness of the material at the cost of analyzing their sense in context. Thus the combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials and perspectives in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to an inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

In previous research it has been noticed that if the qualitative research is purely descriptive, like a case study, there is usually no attempt to generalize beyond the single case or even to build theories (Silverman 2001). It is thus addressed in the literature that qualitative research should therefore produce explanations which are generalizable in

some way, or which have a wider resonance (Silverman 2001, 249). Qualitative research cannot always be used to generalize to the whole population, because of the small number of respondent involved, but the results can serve as a base for hypothesis. In this research increasing the generalization was done by obtaining information about relevant aspects of the population of cases and comparing collected research data to them. In this way it was made easy to demonstrate the differences and similarities across a number of settings. However some of the findings in this study are descriptive in nature and not generalizable.

Problems with cross-cultural methods are often related to linguistic and cultural factors. When conducting an in-depth interview the quality and completeness depend heavily on the interviewer's skills. In this study the interviews in the Netherlands were conducted in English which may have an impact on the quality of the answers. However due to the good level of English skills, there was not seen any major problems in conducting the interviews other than mother tongue. There is also the danger of a lack of a common understanding of central concepts and the societal contexts within which phenomena are located. Such a situation did not thus occur while conducting the interviews. When moving from description to generalization in cross-cultural study, researchers lose a lot of richness of data and begin to make unrealistic assumptions about the nature of reality (Venkatesh 1995). Therefore there is the danger of cultural interference and discrepancies when conducting and analyzing cross-cultural research. In interpreting the results, findings should be examined in relation to their wider societal context and with regard to the limitations of the original research parameters (Hantraits 1995).

Validity is said to be the high in ethnographic methods when compared to surveys and experiments (Boynton-Arthur 1993). A key feature of ethnographic analysis includes the awareness of researchers that their own ethnocentrism could bias the collection of data, especially when doing research in cultures different from own (Boynton-Arthur 1993).



## **5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

In the following the results of the empirical research are presented and discussed. Firstly, clothing and footwear expenditure and clothing industries in the Netherlands and Finland are presented and the market structures are compared to each other. Then the socio-cultural influences, i.e. values, subcultures and lifestyles, which are framing consumers' perception, are discussed. Thirdly the concept of clothing, fashion and brand is discussed, followed by linking the role of fashion system in the perception formation.

When it comes to describing typical Dutch or Finnish styles and clothing we cannot be faced with the problem of stereotypes and making some generalizations. It must be noted that there are and always will be exceptions and it is dangerous to draw too straight generalizations from few examples. However the empirical research showed some typical behaviors towards clothing preferences and fashion perception within both countries. Finally basing on the comparative research done in the two countries, the major similarities and differences are presented and the revised theoretical framework for fashion perception is being drawn.

### ***5.1 Clothing and fashion trade and consumer behavior in the target countries***

Before examining the target countries' clothing trade in depth, the general characteristics of the clothing industry in the Europe needs to be presented. The European clothing industry is about 260 billion EUR industry but it has grown only modestly in value in recent years. The biggest markets in value for the European clothing retail industry are United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy, whereas the highest expenditure per capita can be found in Norway, Austria, Greece, Italy and UK. The fastest growing markets are small Eastern European countries.

The traditional textile industry has changed into fashion trade due to the general development of Western economies. The Western consumers have more money to spend due to increasing disposable incomes. In addition, the rising labor participation of women has replaced homemade production by buying. On the retail side a few large corporations account for a major share of total market revenues. Their scale economies

include the ability to build brands in multiple retail outlets, and greater buying power when negotiating with suppliers. Due to the technological development especially in the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) production facilities have developed at a tremendous space. ICT has become a tool in designing and production. Producers are able to collect point-of-sales information more accurately and also to deliver short series more efficiently. This verticalization assures low stocks and inventories and therefore the fluctuations in final demand are lower. This also creates in the consumer side a need for purchase when there is constantly new clothing in the shops. Companies like Zara and H&M are good examples of companies who offer fast-fashion for affordable price. A day after the fashion shows in Paris or Milan, the photos are already on the internet and six weeks later 'fast fashion' companies can sell replicas in their shops. Copying fashion has taken over the original design. This new way of operating has caused traditional fashion and clothing companies to rethink their strategies and operations throughout the Europe. These general developments have had an impact on the target countries as well, which are presented next in detail.

### **5.1.1 The Netherlands**

The Netherlands has a strong tradition of textile production and craftsmanship but it is disappearing due to the outsourcing of production into third world countries. Currently many fashion companies have only design, marketing and sales in house. Dutch fashion is commercially strong. There are brands which have been successful internationally for years (e.g. Mexx, G-Star, Turnover and Gsus). When it comes to high fashion it is said that there is no fashion history in the Netherlands - at least not such like in France or Italy - and therefore the Dutch fashion is based a lot on modernist design tradition. The typical Dutch design is described by many interviewees as loud, very straight and experimental.

The clothing sector in the Netherlands has shown very moderate growth since 2002. In 2006 the clothing sector started to recover, with value sales rising 2 % to reach EUR 12.0 billion. The main reasons for this negative retail environment were the slump in the Dutch economy and the harsh retail climate (Euromonitor 2007b, 1). In 2006 the consumer expenditure on clothing and footwear per capital reached 802.3 EUR and it is expected to grow in 2007. Despite fierce competition in the lower and middle segments,



the Dutch are now willing to spend money on quality designer clothing and footwear, which is more visible in men's clothing than in women's clothing. (Euromonitor 2007b) Particularly men's outerwear grew by 3 % in 2006, which indicates that Dutch men invested in formal clothing and clothing for special occasions. This correlates to the common understanding, that when economic conditions are good, people invest more on expensive clothing such as suits and business wear.

**Table 3. Consumer expenditure on clothing in the Netherlands 2002-2007**

<b>Consumer Expenditure Historic / Forecast</b>						
<b>Value at current prices</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Clothing and footwear € mn	13,569.0	12,989.0	12,821.9	13,305.5	13,104.6	13,546.9
Clothing € mn	11,278.8	10,748.1	10,654.3	11,029.0	10,852.1	11,203.2
Clothing materials € mn	104.9	97.4	94.9	94.8	90.9	91.0
Other articles of clothing and accessories € mn	938.9	902.7	899.3	931.4	920.8	962.1
<b>Per Capita</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Clothing and footwear	842.5	802.2	788.6	816.0	802.3	828.2
Clothing	700.3	663.8	655.3	676.4	664.4	684.9
Clothing materials	6.5	6.0	5.8	5.8	5.6	5.6
Other articles of clothing and accessories	58.3	55.7	55.3	57.1	56.4	58.8

Source: Euromonitor 2008

The clothing distribution structure in the Netherlands is varied with a mix of large specialist chains, mono brand stores and independents (Modint 2007). In 2007 the retail distribution of outerwear in value was following:

- Retailer chains, specialized in clothing 42 %
- Specialty shops 31 %
- Department stores 7 %
- Home shopping 6 %
- Discounters 3 %
- Marketplace 1 %
- Others (incl. supermarkets) 10 % (Tap 06.02.2008)

When examining the distribution structure in quantity, especially the share of discounters increases to 9 % taking away share from the specialty shops. H&M has the

highest clothing brand share (3,2 %) by retail value in the Netherlands. The following brands are Mexx (1,0 %), Esprit (1,0 %) and Jinglers (by C&A Nederland, 0,8 %). When examined by company retail value C&A scores highest (4,4 %) followed by H&M (3,2 %) and MEXX (1,0 %). (Euromonitor 2007b) The relatively small shares of leading brands illustrate the fierce competition and large offering of the clothing market.

Some general issues were raised when examining the typical way of clothing oneself and purchasing clothing in the Netherlands. Almost all respondents mentioned the importance of price and casual style. Rens Tap, a consultant at trade association Modint confirms that the Dutch market is a price market. The clothing prices have come down and clothing is often sold on discount around the year. Therefore discounters and cheap 'fast fashion' companies are important retailers for Dutch consumers. The typical way of clothing oneself was often described as casual. People dress themselves very comfortably, sporty and functionally. Men often wear a sailing jacket throughout the year, which is warm enough in winter and protective enough when it rains. Street wear and especially sports shoes like NIKE and Adidas are performing well. The weather was said to be one of the reasons why people wear such casual clothing. It is accepted to wear casual clothing more and more also on formal occasions. There are some places and jobs which require formal clothing such as banks, stock exchange etc., but in general casual clothes at work are more and more accepted. Brands and designer items are not that highly valued among Dutch consumers as in the neighboring countries. There are signs, however, that the Dutch are becoming more fashion conscious, which can be seen especially among young consumers. These general characteristics are discussed more in depth in the forthcoming chapters.

### **5.1.2 Finland**

The Finnish clothing industry accounts only for about 10 % of the clothing market supply and 90 % of clothing is imported (Gorski 17.03.2008). Historically the Finnish clothing industry based much on the export to Soviet Union. This export was dominating the overall production of clothing. In a way this export production was so easy that the industry did not need to develop or change operations until the collapse of Soviet Union. Many clothing companies did die when the exports to Soviet Union ended. Finnish clothing used to have a quality image, but due to the development of



distribution channel structure in Finland and the disappearance of markets some clothing companies changed their quality standards and sell nowadays their clothing in supermarkets in a lower price. (Gorski 17.03.2008) Nowadays there is though a rise of young designer companies in the capital region and appreciation towards Finnish design, but the overall respect towards Finnish clothing design is somewhat low. The consumers perceive Finnish design clothing as expensive and aesthetically not pleasing or the young designers' clothing are expensive and difficult to get. (Lehtinen 13.02.2008)

The retail value of clothing and footwear (excluding sales tax) reached 1,512.0 million EUR in 2006 in Finland. This is a 4,5 % growth from the previous year. The increase in clothing retail is also expected to continue in 2007 with 5,2 %. (Euromonitor 2007a) Clothing and footwear have experienced significant growth in per capita expenditure over the period 1990-2006 with per capita expenditure reaching EUR 757.7 in the latter year. The increase was mainly attributable to rising disposable incomes which can be seen in expenditure on premium garments and footwear. Also better international media coverage, internet, availability and wider choice of clothing have increased the overall interest and spending on clothing (Modint 2007, 9). The households' disposable incomes have increased during the last years but the expenditure on clothing is not increasing linearly. When in 1985 households used 6,3 % of their income on clothing and shoes nowadays the number is 3,4 % (Gorski 17.03.2008).

**Table 4. Consumer expenditure on clothing in Finland 2002-2007**

<b>Consumer Expenditure Historic / Forecast</b>						
<b>Value at current prices</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Clothing and footwear € mn	3,171.8	3,386.0	3,574.7	3,759.7	3,982.3	4,193.1
Clothing materials € mn	70.1	75.8	78.0	81.7	86.1	86.6
Other articles of clothing and accessories € mn	170.9	184.4	193.0	203.3	215.7	224.6
<b>Per Capita</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>
Clothing and footwear	610.6	650.4	684.8	718.0	757.7	794.6
Clothing materials	13.5	14.6	14.9	15.6	16.4	16.4
Other articles of clothing and accessories	32.9	35.4	37.0	38.8	41.0	42.6

Source: Euromonitor 2008

In 2006 the distribution channel structure was following: specialty chains account for about 49 %, department stores and supermarkets for 36 % and sport stores and others about for 15 % of the clothing distribution (Gorski 17.03.2008). Investors, community planning and big retail groups have influenced the emergence of market and department store structures in Finland. Large retail groups have built big markets outside the city centers and have therefore got a sales channel for themselves. This is more common outside the capital area. On the other hand during the recent years many international players have entered the market. They have however limited their presence mainly to the larger population areas due to low population density, long distances between towns and few large catchment areas. When examining the clothing specialist's sale in 2005 the top three retailers accounted for around 32 % of the Finnish clothing sector. They were: H&M (13.7 %), Seppälä (9.4 %), Texmoda Fashion Group (8.8 %), Lindex (5.6 %) and L-Fashion Group (5.1 %). Out of these five, Seppälä and Lindex belong to Stockmann Group, which holds also large department store chains. The rest of the market is quite fragmented (Modint 2007).

Finnish dressing is still dominated quite a lot by the seasons and people have a distinct separation between winter and summer clothing and sometimes even spring and autumn clothing as well. Due to the distinction to winter and summer clothing, people's clothing stock in use in Finland is smaller than with an average Dutch person. Also the season may be reflected in expenditure, by increasing it, because people need to buy clothing for its protective reason. If the climate changes, the clothing consumption's clear seasonality may though disappear. In Finland it is still generally not highly appreciated to spend big sums of money on clothing. Finnish consumers though pay increasing attention to different occasions in terms of clothing. Formal dressing is typical in some professions and family occasions, such as funerals, weddings and birthdays, but there is no dress code in schools, working places or free time. Business clothing is expected in the work environment, but is very often smart casual style. During spare time casual clothing is still preferred and the general attire is casual. Young people are increasingly interested in trends and fashion issues as well as brands, which will most likely boost sales of clothing and footwear in the future. Young men especially have started to put more emphasis on the way they look in recent years. The increasing popularity of international brands and fashion is mainly attributable to rising levels of disposable



income and the growing presence of international retailers, magazines and internet that introduced new trends to the country more quickly. Finland could therefore be well described as a young fashion consumption country (Gorski 17.03.2008).

### **5.1.3 Countries' prerequisites for fashion trade**

During the last years the clothing consumption per capita in Finland has reached almost the same level of the Netherlands. In European comparison Finland and the Netherlands do not rank within the biggest clothing consumption countries when measured per capita, but are somewhere in the middle in the European comparison. In both countries the consumption is growing but is modest in comparison to Eastern European countries. The clothing industry is converged in both countries into an international fashion trade and it is not dependent on national technology or clothing companies anymore, but the clothing is imported to the countries and sold via national and international retailer chains.

There is no homogenous style in the market but many different styles which all are more or less in fashion. Actually everything is said to be in fashion and it is not possible to say what is the latest, newest thing is or what is the right wideness of the hem when all variations are offered. Even though there are a variety of items in the market, the overall clothing offering is found to be very similar between international retailers. It is significantly influenced by global fashion trends, styles and colors in a slightly different forms and cuts. Global retailers usually bring the same collection into all countries, without adapting to local needs. One could say that international retailers unify the way of clothing and styles within the mass across different countries.

The number of international retailers and the variety of clothing offering in the market depend much on the country's market specific factors: how easy the country is to access and how attractive the market is for global fashion retailers. Finland and the Netherlands are both European Union countries, and therefore they are faced with free market access. Barriers to entry are not high but few large corporations already account for major share of revenues, they have more negotiation power with suppliers and thus allow them to compete more on price. Fashion trade needs some conditions to operate. First of all there needs to be certain level of consumer's disposable income and general economic

**wealth.** Second, there needs to be an **infrastructure** in the forms of retail structure, media and fashion promoters. These mediators make the fashion change and interesting for consumers to purchase. Finally the consumers need to be interested in investing in **outlook and self** and the basic human needs of safety and physiological must already be fulfilled. When these prerequisites are met, also international retailers are interested to enter the market which in turn increases offering and supply, and this in turn may boost the demand. Finland and the Netherlands have met these conditions at different time, why it might be reflected in consumer behavior and in people's customs.

Fashion is often reflected with hedonism and consumer culture. When consumers' income level and general wealth increase, free-time and enjoyment take a higher share of daily activities in which communication of aesthetics and pleasure are more important (Hirvonen 28.03.2008). Finnish values are based on hard working culture and clothing's meaning has long been in satisfying the basic physiological and protective needs. The Netherlands has on the other hand a different history; they have reached a certain level of wealth earlier and therefore they have had the resources for consumption earlier in history. Their cultural heritage is based substantially on multiculturalism, freedom and individualistic attitude. To a certain degree Dutch people have started to fulfill their self-actualization needs earlier than Finns, which can be seen in the increase of hedonistic consumption goods such as fashion. One can assume Dutch consumers to have more experience in consumption and clothing oneself than do Finnish consumers. *Dutch people are braver when it comes to clothing style* said Helinä Luttinen (15.11.2007) in the interview. This observation might indeed be the result of the different historical development of clothing and fashion in the countries. When socioeconomic conditions increase, consumption of social and sensory goods to satisfy symbolic and hedonistic goods is more likely (Roth 1995, 166).

Finland used to have until recently an immature retail and consumer spending structure. From the distribution structure's point of view Finland is similar to an Eastern and Central European hypermarket and supermarket structures. In Finland the supermarkets and department stores account for a large share in clothing distribution, which is projected in the features of clothing. The clothing has consequently lower quality, lower price and less emphasis on design or fashion elements. In the Netherlands the



municipalities have restricted building large markets and shopping malls. Therefore the centers of cities with narrow shopping streets and small shops are the main shopping areas. However consumers' price sensitiveness can also be seen in the Netherlands where discounters account for 9 % of market share when measured in volumes (Tap 06.02.2008). When it comes to high fashion and their luxury brands in specific, Finland and the Netherlands have not attracted many retailers in the market. In the Netherlands there are only two or three streets which sell high fashion, in Finland only few shops. Additionally there is no own high fashion industry or history, which is the opposite case of for example France and Italy, which would enhance the appreciation towards high fashion designer clothing.

The different market structure and history have a major influence on clothing offering, general interest in clothing and outlook, and consequently on consumption habits. The market structures shape the nature of clothing and fashion trade and have an indirect influence on people's perception formation. Solomon et al. (2002, 442) define culture as the collective memory of society which defines its social organizations as well as its economic and political systems among others. Therefore the countries' market structures are an expression of a specific kind of culture. Shared cultural values have a far reaching effect, and one cannot examine culture and economy separately, but culture subsumes economy (Solomon et al. 2002, 442). Therefore it is necessary to outline the main characteristics of the markets in the target countries (see table 5) and to reflect during the forthcoming discussion about the findings, whether these factors have an impact on the perception between Dutch and Finnish consumers.

**Table 5. Comparison of fashion market characters in Finland and the Netherlands**

<b>Fashion market characters</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>The Netherlands</b>
Clothing expenditure total (i.e. market size)	Low	High
Clothing expenditure per capita	Medium	Medium
Distribution structure	Concentrated	Diversified
Cultural heritage	Work oriented, introverted	Individualistic, exploring, multicultural

## ***5.2 Consumer behavior and socio-cultural influences***

This chapter discusses the major values of Finnish and Dutch consumers, as well as major subcultures and lifestyles. In order to fully understand the fashion, one needs to discuss the fashion in its right context which is confronted by megatrends and described often as postmodern. Before going in outlining culture specific components and their influence on clothing perception, the impact of megatrends and postmodern characteristics are being discussed.

### **5.2.1 Megatrends and postmodern time**

With postmodernism it is meant the age we are currently living in. It is characterized often by networked society and globalization. These characteristics of postmodernism are often described also with megatrends. Megatrends in general shape the world by changing people's ideas, values and views on things and are reflected in consumer needs and consumption. Trend forecasting is a common procedure in fashion business, which is used to time supply so that it responds at the right time to the consumer needs.

Postmodernism in philosophy is often described with the freedom and multitude of different ideas. It can be seen also in fashion; the fashion sector is no longer dictated by "a single fashion King", or even by just one fashion city, but a multitude of perspectives coming from many designers, in various cities and different parts of the world. In postmodernist thinking the individual is seen in relation to others. People are defined by age, nationality, gender, class, and ethnicity and so on. This makes the self more fragmented. Now many more people can make a claim to subjectivity, who were earlier excluded (women, blacks, homosexuals etc.). This development has resulted in much greater freedom in the formation of identity. Earlier it was one's class and gender which determined what to wear but today one can play with the identity and fashion is an important component of it. Identity is something people construct and they know that they have the freedom – sometimes almost the duty - to do that (Straatman 05.12.2007). One megatrend related to identity construction has been increased self expression and displaying it outside. Clothing as well as other consumer culture products is a good tool for it. Postmodernist culture can be called "cut & paste" culture, where everyone can mix together their clothes and even their identity. This increased individualism can also



be seen as a counter-trend for globalization.

Finally ethics and sustainable development are current trends that are forecasted to have increasing impact on masses in the future. Ethically produced clothing in terms of labor and production are going to be important aspects in clothing trade. It is also reflected symbolically in colors, in which the green color has been for few years a “trend color” but it is forecasted to continue as a predominating color. Actually it is more of a statement than a single color nowadays because of its symbolic value (Piironen 14.03.2008). Even though fast fashion and overconsumption are characteristics of this time, these new trends do not necessarily exclude each other. Understanding megatrends is essential since they occur globally but their scope and expression may differ across cultures. Given the outline of global trends, next the nation specific cultural values are analyzed.

### **5.2.2 Cultural Values**

Research on cultural values’ influence on clothing perception is difficult to obtain with the primary research. Therefore the following analysis is based on established value scores of Hofstede in Finland and the Netherlands and reflected on the found market behavior. The scores are presented in comparison with the scores of Western Europe average (including the USA and Canada) and with the world average. By this mean, it is possible to compare the results with so called postmodern Western countries’ values which are said to be engaged in the typical fashion change behavior, but also with the world average which includes all Hofstede’s measured countries.

Waarts and van Everdingen (2006) have developed a cultural map based on data of Hofstede and Hall. Their findings are congruent with other researchers that it is possible to outline three different country clusters within Western European countries (including the USA and Canada). The Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands) were found to be fairly close to each other both geographically as well as culturally. The second cluster includes Latin countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, France and Belgium). Interestingly Belgium was from the Latin cluster closest to the Nordic cluster, but still more on the Latin side. Finally Anglo&Germanic cluster (the USA, Canada, UK, Germany, Switzerland and Austria) was identified, in which countries are

culturally close, but geographically distanced from each other. This classification shows that Finland and The Netherlands should have the same cultural values so we can study the implications to clothing in comparison with other countries.

**Table 6. Scores of Finland and the Netherlands on the Hofstede and Hall dimensions**

Country	IND	PDI	MASC	UAI	LTO	Low/high context (1=low; 16=high)	Mono-/Polychronic (1=very mono.; 20=very poly)
Finland	63	33	26	59	41	4	3
Netherlands	80	38	14	53	38	6	7
Western average	69	41	44	61	34	6.4	6.1
World average	55	43	50	64	45	-	-

Source: Waarts & van Everdingen 2006, 649

The biggest differences in the Hofstede's dimensions between the Western average and the world average are in individualism and long term orientation. The Western countries (and consequently Finland and the Netherlands as well) have high individuality score and short-term orientation. When examining fashion and fashion change as a phenomenon, it is characterized with fast change and individual identity construction and play. Fashion also emphasizes the Zeitgeist, people's desire to be up to date and aware what is happening currently, not in the past or in the future. Fashion is therefore often characterized as a Western way of dressing. This Western way of dressing thus arises from the people's ideals and values. One could argue that these two values – individualism and short-term orientation- are prerequisites or at least enhancing factors for fashion to occur in the form as it is nowadays. Western countries have good playfield for fashion to occur due to the values people hold and the good economic conditions the countries have. However the Western fashion is nowadays found also in non-Western countries like for example in Japan, which is a collectivistic, long-term oriented country. Therefore it is not possible to conclude of fashion to occur only in individualistic and short-term oriented countries. We would need to study the meaning of fashion in Japan in order to see if it has the same meaning in there as in Western countries. The Netherlands is one of the most individualistic cultures in the world which was seen in some interviewees' great emphasis on individuality in dress. Many Dutch respondents, especially from design background, mentioned that Dutch people dress in a very individual way. Individuality is reflected also in GfK market panel results; 49 % of



Dutch women mention as the most important aspect for clothing “represent me” (Van Bakel 05.02.2008). When the same question was asked from market experts who know what Dutch consumers consume, the answer was more often collective way of dressing. Perhaps the explanation for this disagreement comes from the fact that everyone knows they have the freedom for individual expression in clothing. It is like the freedom of speech. However, even though people know and want to express their unique identity in clothing, it is done in relation to commonly established clothing norms and social groups. Even though people want to express uniqueness, their clothing style may look very similar outside. The Finnish way of clothing was more often described as collectivistic, thus there was clear a distinction between young and old consumer groups. It seems that young consumers in Finland are more individualistic than older people in terms of clothing. The mass market and recognition drive uniformity, but differentiation and individualism is growing (Priest 2005). Individualism is a megatrend, spreading globally, so one needs to question if the individual spirit is caused by cultural value or megatrend.

The second highest Hofstede dimension for the Netherlands and Finland is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), compared to a World average of 64. This moderate dimension was not perceived to influence consumers in Finland or in the Netherlands significantly. In the literature it has been found out that in cultures of strong UAI, people tend to be better groomed because it is one way to face a threatening world (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002, 64). In addition moderate uncertainty avoidance rate was not seen as a consequence for moderate fashion adoption, which thus was the result of van Everdingen & Waarts (2003) on adoption of technological innovations. In their study the higher score on UAI resulted on a lower ERP adoption rate. Rather fashion adoption depends on personal characteristics, which will be discussed further in the chapter 5.3.1.

Both countries score lower than the world and Western average on Power Distance (PDI). In low PDI countries status is not appreciated to show, powerful people actually tend to look less powerful. This can be seen in the behavior and lifestyle of people with power in the Netherlands and Finland. People are treated equally and money is not showed that well in dress. However it was noticed that in both countries there are groups who show the wealth in clothing and other products, but in general it is not appreciated

and there is no need for that kind of behavior. Therefore luxury brands and high fashion clothing may not succeed in these countries that well as it might be the case of high power distance cultures. One consequence of low power distance can be seen in the social class structure in Finland, which is characterized by a large middle class and tiny lower and upper classes.

The lowest Hofstede Dimension for the Netherlands and Finland is Masculinity (MAS), which though in Finland is the highest one in the Nordic cluster (Waarts & van Everdingen 2006). This relatively low MAS index value indicates low level of role differentiation between genders. Feminine cultures value quality of life and status is not very important. This value score differentiates Finland and the Netherlands from the Western countries and also from the world average. In combination to low power distance one can imply that power and status are not important, and it is not showed in the dress. Branded products as well as prestige luxury products are found to be most valued in masculine countries and also in large power distance countries (De Mooij & Hofstede 2002). Thus it may not be surprising that luxury items are not appealing to the mass of Dutch and Finnish consumers. The quality in life, typical for feminine cultures, is reflected in comfortable and functional dressing. The role equality between sexes is difficult to see as such in dress, it would be easier to see it in an existing role differentiation. One could argue that actually the similarity in dress is the outcome of low masculinity. Both women and men are wearing similar kinds of clothing like trousers, jeans, shirts and sneakers, but there are clothes that differentiate women from the men and vice versa, if it is needed. Gender has an impact on clothing behavior but role differentiation or equality between sexes does not necessarily have an influence on certain kind of clothing preference. Perhaps the equality between men and women is reflected more on women's own will and choice on clothing decisions in Finland and the Netherlands, their role as a woman is not given outside but arises from her self. When women and men can do the same things in the society, perhaps it is the practicality of original men's dress that has made women adapt to men's dresses such as trousers.

When analyzing the cultures with Hall's classification, Finland and the Netherlands are classified as low context and monochronic countries. France, Italy, Spain and Portugal



are the only countries in Europe which account just for the opposite; high context and polychronic culture. For consumer perception it was difficult to see some sort of an impact of Hall's classification, but when it comes to conducting business, it was clearer. In the interviews it became clear that the reason for North- and West-European fashion retailers to expand to the Netherlands and Finland is seen in the easiness in conducting business. The geographical proximity plays also a role in expansion but it is together with the cultural proximity. For Dutch companies it is easy to conduct business with Nordic companies, because of the similar kind of mentality (Tap 06.02.2008). In addition to other values one can confirm the country clustering by Waarts & van Everdingen (2006) and its implication to consumer behavior.

Based on the discussion above, one can conclude that the value synthesis made in the chapter 3.3.7 can be used in examining values' impact on clothing preferences. These cultural values have a frameworking effect on consumer behavior. Consumers do not process these established values consciously; rather they are learned and enhanced in the society. These values set a frame within which the consumer behavior occurs. Between Finland and the Netherlands these values' impact was found very similar, thus with individuality there was more stressed influence in the Netherlands. There is however other socio-cultural factors which shape the perception further and they are presented in the following chapters.

### **5.2.3 Subcultures**

Even though it was possible to outline national values typical for the countries, there is a bunch of distinctive smaller subcultures within the cultures. These classifiers of subcultures - social background, ethnic background, gender, age and geographic location - were found to shape the clothing consumption in both countries the consumer perception, in some cases in a similar way and in other cases different way. However, the combination of the subcultural classifiers needs to be identified, even though it is possible to distinguish within one classifier as well.

#### **5.2.3.1 Social class**

Social origin, education, income, work and all other social aspects were found have an

influence on how much and what kinds of clothing consumers buy during the lifetime. Income was found to have a positive effect on brand consciousness and fashion in general. The wealthier one is and more disposable income one has, the more interested one is on branded items and fashionable items in general. Due to high income one can afford branded products because they are usually more expensive in comparison to non-branded ones. Branded products are also a sign of quality which may be more valued among higher income classes. When it comes to high fashion these products are more expensive in relation to mass produced clothing. Even though the similar style can be found in lower price category, some consumers appreciate the designer and/or handicraft in the dress and are willing to pay more for it. Often the consumers of a couture product ask for differentiation and use it perhaps only once.

Brands and fashion are reachable to lower income classes as well. Among the lower income classes there are consumers who are brand aware and fashion oriented as well. Even though they do not have necessarily the resources to buy expensive items they want to be fashionable. They favor “fast fashion” companies’ affordable fashions to fulfill this desire or in some cases may use a vast share of disposable income on luxury item. Very often these consumers are younger people. Due to the fact that there are companies who offer cheap fashionable items, the income is not fully explaining the fashion or brand consciousness. Secondly, there are people whom clothing are important thing in life and hence are willing to spend more money on clothing than on other things, even though they have low disposable income.

Income does not thus impact solely and linearly clothing consumption. As Bourdieu (1984) has put it, class divisions are determined by a combination of the varying degrees of social, economic, and cultural capital, especially by the last one. It was also found in this study that especially family, parents, education and work determine a lot how one’s perception towards clothing is shaped. Some people, who were interested in fashion and liked to follow fashion, had learned that already at young age at home. This was also reflected respectively in their children and their interest in clothing and the styles they adapt. People tend to form an aesthetic taste early in the childhood which is enforced by social interaction. Also higher education enhances some sort of an understanding of and appreciation towards fashion, clothing and outlook in specific. *People with a higher*



*education level subjectively reflect and get involved with certain kinds of things, that they see and have got to know, that dressing is one significant part of conscious, cultured society or lifestyle. Just like good international manners* (Hirvonen 28.03.2008). Often people with higher education level also have higher income which in turn enhances clothing consumption, and increases brand and fashion awareness in specific. Between Finland and the Netherlands there were no significant differences in this category, perhaps one could mention Finland to be even more equal between social classes in monetary terms, but this difference should be measured quantitative measures to approve it. In addition two interviewees (one in each country) mentioned that the so called “old-rich” people tend not to show the wealth in clothing; where as the “new-rich” people show it more openly. They though thought it was more of a cliché, and showing off with clothing in means of brands and designer items may be a contemporary trend. Trends in general may change clothing preference for a while, when the preference and behavior may be controversial. In addition the old-rich people have learned different consumption habits in comparison to the new-rich people. To conclude, clothing behavior is learned in social interaction and higher income level enables bigger clothing consumption in both countries, but does not explain fashion consumption explicitly anymore.

#### **5.2.3.2 Ethnic background**

Ethnic background definitely shapes clothing perception and behavior due to different values, religion, and identity concepts. Finland has a relatively small number of foreign citizens, i.e. 2,5 % of the population. The largest groups of foreign citizens are from Russia, Estonia, Sweden and Somalia. (Statistics Finland 2008) The Netherlands in comparison has a high percentage of foreign citizens, i.e. 18% of the population. In the two biggest cities in the Netherlands the percentage of ethnic people reaches 50 %. Foreign citizens from non-western countries accounted for about 11% of the Dutch population in 2006, particularly from Turkey, Surinam, Morocco and the Dutch Antilles. (Statistics Netherlands 2008) Somalian, Turkish and Moroccan people are predominantly Muslims so therefore it is concentrated discussing in this section the Muslim ethnic group especially from the Dutch point of view. Due to the small number of ethnic groups in Finland it was found occasionally difficult by the interviewees to discuss them profoundly. However the Russian people living in Finland was the most

visible ethnic group, so therefore this group and its preferences are discussed as well.

The **Muslim** faith plays a significant role in people's lives and has clear rules for clothing. Consequently the religion shapes their clothing behavior. It was discovered that in the Netherlands there is a difference between the first generation immigrants and the second generation young people. The first generation is clothing very much according to their origin and Muslim tradition. They have been able to maintain their way of living and have not adapted to the Western customs and traditions - and neither their clothing. Marketplaces, which account 3% of the Dutch clothing distribution, are one major place for clothing shopping, next to the shops that sell clothing especially for Muslim needs. The second generation is growing up in a Western culture with Muslim religion and family, and is facing a stronger integration force to the Western society and culture. This can be seen especially in women's clothing, which is often mixture of Western fashion and Muslim tradition and religion. The Muslim way of dressing with women should be modest, some body parts such as head, arms and legs need to be covered and colors are plain, often black. However these second generation women adapt their dress more or less with Western fashion influences, with colors, accessories and stylistic details. Some girls are dressing completely like Western girls, some strictly like Muslims and others mixing up different styles.

Muslim men do not have that strict rule for covering their body. In their clothing behavior brands and luxury is highly emphasized. Luxury brands like Dolce&Gabbana, Gucci and Versace are preferred in black, silver and golden colors and leather. The brands are shown and the brand name occurs often in a visible place. It does not matter if the clothing actually is original, the meaning of wearing the item is more important. Their behavior is more masculine and a bit macho compared to Dutch men and they want to boast with their clothing. Also in Finland that kind of clothing was noticed by two interviewees. Money and prestige are valued more than by original Dutch people and therefore the wealth is shown through consumer products (car, mobile phone, clothing) to the audience. These kinds of items are relatively cheap and visible in comparison to e.g. real estate. The home countries of these Muslim men score in Hofstede's value classification high in power distance and masculinity (Itim International 2003). Among these values it is appreciated to show status, power,



achievement and success. This is in accordance with De Mooij and Hofstede (2002): since luxury items can be used as manifestations of one's success, they are likely to be more attractive to members of masculine countries than to members of feminine countries. The design of the car is more appealing to countries with high power distance and the size and power of the engine to masculine countries. These ethnic groups are thus holding the values of their home country, and are not acculturated with the Dutch or Finnish values. The ethnic groups are usually socializing with people from the same original culture rather than interacting much with the locals. Therefore they are influenced in their behavior with their Muslim peer groups.

In Finland the **Russian** ethnic group was found to dress differently from the Finnish people, which was most visible within women's clothing. Russian women tend to dress more feminine and decorative way, and also among men brands and especially luxury brands are more valued and preferred. The decorative style can be seen e.g. in a preference for a T-shirt which should have some decorative aspects, when in Finland a plain shirt is appreciated. Feminine body structures are more emphasized in style in forms of clothing design, shoes, accessories, and materials. Fur in materials is commonly used for its prestige. In colors gold, silver black and shiny colors are used very often. When looking at the Hofstede's estimated value scores for Russia, especially high power distance, collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance and higher masculinity differentiate Russian values from Finnish ones (Itim International 2003). In specific the high power distance can be seen reflected in Russian people's increased preference for fashion products, luxury items and brands. For them it is a showing status when for a Finnish consumer it is more of a quality sign. However one need to keep in mind that Russian people living in Finland may be in a better economic situation than an average Russian person. Additionally not all Russian dress in above described way, but this style is very visible outside to observe and therefore people form that kind of stereotypes of Russian people. However, Eevaliina Frigren, design manager from Seppälä, confirms that Russian women's preference for clothing differs from Finnish women's preferences, emphasizing that Russian women want more decorative, feminine and trendy clothing (19.03.2008).

The implication of ethnic background's influence on clothing has to do with the

question of identity and the desire to distinguish from the majority of society. For Muslims, their identity is defined by their Muslim faith in first hand, not by their nationality of origin country or nationality of a Western country (Versluijs 05.12.2007). Congruent with Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer (2005) one can say that low level of acculturation results in higher level of involvement in ethnic dress as we can see among first generation Muslims in the Netherlands. However, also increased acculturation to majority of the society can increase the involvement to ethnic apparel (Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer 2005). Some Muslim women in the Netherlands are not obliged to wear scarf, but they want to do it because it shows who they are. It can be concluded that the choice for dressing according to ethnic influences is a choice for certain identity and the wish for showing it. It is a way of understanding self and constructing the world around. Kaiser (1990) argued that assimilation and acculturation take place within many societies, as individuals of diverse cultural heritage introduce aesthetic codes and ideologies. This observation is true, since ethnicity has been lately very often as a design component in fashion. However when we consider the Muslim dress, it will never become fashionable because it restricts everything fashion based on: freedom, sexuality and endless choices.

#### **5.2.3.3 Age**

In the following the impact of age is studied by dividing consumers into three broad age groups. The group classification is only indicative and not verified in real life. The aim is to show the trends and typical behaviors within age groups, not to outline clear age groupings.

Young consumers (14-25 years old) are the most fashion and brand-oriented in Finland and in the Netherlands which is congruent with the studies by Hyllegard et al. (2005) and Rocha et al. (2005). They are the most interested in fashion and follow the latest trends. They adapt new trends faster and change styles faster than other age groups. Young people are also the most brand-aware. They are grown up with brands and therefore for them it is normal to use brands and styles for identity construction. Their self concept and identity is not clearly defined yet but is evolving and therefore young people are likely to experiment more with the clothing. Fashion and brands are tools for trying on different identities and these identities are displayed outside. When older



people reflect their attitudes and lifestyles in other behavioral ways, for youngsters clothing is the main way to do it. Youngsters are also active media users and modifiers; they exchange ideas about companies, clothing and styles more than older ones.

Youngsters hold very homogeneous traditional values, but their lifestyles are very heterogeneous (Hiltunen 13.03.2008). They are highly influenced by their group and the group structure is enhanced by similar clothing. They are very individualistic but within the group's defined style. Music, movies, hobbies, celebrities, idols, ideologies, attitudes, social background and combinations of them determine the group formation and clothing. Even though young people are the most fashionable ones, they hold the least financial assets. Parents' disposable income has increased during the last years and therefore many more teenagers are able to buy branded products and expensive fashion items. Especially in Finland the young generation is the first generation that has grown up in a wealthy society. They are the first ones that are grown into consumption society as well. Even though their values are traditional, they use clothing and fashion in a different way in comparison to older generations.

The next age group, from 25 to 35 years old, is an interesting case from the brand retailer's point of view. These people are in working life and thus hold better financial assets than youngsters. When it comes to attracting young and middle aged consumers, who are already familiar with brands and follow more or less fashion, brands have started to "grow up" with their former teenager customers. This can be seen e.g. in the case of H&M who is now bringing a new clothing chain in the market (COS) which is targeted for 25+ consumers. The idea is to offer fashionable items but for a bit more expensive price and in a different, more adult style. There are other companies following the similar pattern. Especially jeans retailers may face a need for revising their concepts, because also older people are used to wear jeans. They are used to wear certain brand but when they get older their taste will shift. Therefore there is a big danger for a retailer to lose customers but also an opportunity to keep their customer base by bringing in new concepts.

When it comes to older people (50+) they were found less interested in fashionable items and brands in both countries in comparison to younger ones. These baby boomers

have not grown in a consumption culture and outlook has not been that important. They also value more practical, conservative and classic styles than fashionable ones. It does not mean that older people do not want to look good and be fashionable but often the fashionable dresses just do not fit. The older people are usually bigger in size, and the current fashion retailers design the clothing according to a model-type of figure in size 34. The lack of proper sizes in fashionable styles was very often mentioned as a problem in both countries. Especially in the Netherlands the length makes the fit even a bigger problem. This age group is the one who holds the biggest financial assets and therefore they could be better targeted with suitable clothing and styles. In addition it is clear that consumers' psychological age determines clothing behavior not their chronological age. The way how older people see themselves and how clothing companies see them, is highly contrary. In principle older people could and would wear the same clothing as 30 year olds, if the cuts would take into consideration an adult body shape.

#### **5.2.3.4 Geographical location**

The geographical location has an influence inside the country but also inside the cities. Within a country there are areas that differ from each other regarding clothing styles and fashionability. Urban areas and especially the capital city is the most fashionable area in Finland and in the Netherlands. The newest fashion trends arrive first to the capital area and other big cities when they are diffused to other areas. This is due to bigger international influences, the inhabitants, distribution structure and better offering. The inhabitants of the capital cities (and big cities) are younger; more educated and have usually higher income than in average. The possibility to buy high fashion was found mainly in the capital cities.

Outside the urban areas people wear more practical and functional clothing, which is not necessarily the latest fashion, or a brand. People who live in the countryside do not have that good offering and that many possibilities to buy clothing. It is not typical to travel to the next biggest city just for shopping unless there is a real need for new clothing. People in the rural areas have basically the same media channels (TV, internet, magazines) in use to follow the latest trends, but the difference is in the people's needs and in the offering, which shape the clothing style. Especially in Finland markets and



sport stores count a big share of clothing distribution in the countryside, where the clothing is very simple, comfortable and not that trendy as in the big cities. In Finland also the income of people were mentioned to be often lower in the countryside than in the cities.

The difference between Finland and the Netherlands came out when discussing the geographical areas more in detail. The biggest cities and some regions in the Netherlands have an own unique character which was not the case in Finland. In Finland the interviewees could distinguish differences only between the big cities and countryside whilst in the Netherlands particular cities and regions had clearer characters. Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands is renowned for its liberality and it is described as the hippy, artistic and trendy city. This is reflected also in the clothing of people; they dare to wear more personal styles and sometimes shocking combinations. The Hague was described as grayish, bureaucratic suit city because of governmental and international institutions, which in turn can be seen in more luxurious, correct style in clothing of people and consequently in the retail structure.

Also the south and north part of the Netherlands was mentioned by the interviewees different. In the south there are more luxurious shops and people were said to dress better than in the north. Over there it is more common to dress up than in the north. The south of the Netherlands is culturally closer to Belgium and France than the north and is a catholic area, where as the rest of the country is influenced by Calvinism and protestant religions.

The second dimension of geographical impact is found inside the cities on a suburb level, which was stronger in the Netherlands than in Finland. This might be due to small size of Finnish cities as well as more equal income distribution and city planning. People who have similar needs and tastes tend to live near one another (Solomon et al. 2002, 526-527) which was more often the case in the Netherlands. There are neighborhoods that have attracted people with higher income and it is hence reflected in people's increased use of money on clothing. This has consequently attracted brand and fashion retailers in the neighborhood. Similarly immigrants which often have lower income are centered on certain suburbs. However, it is not the neighborhood that shapes

the peoples' clothing consumption but the income and lifestyle of these people, who are gathered to live in the specific neighborhood. Different living areas attract certain kinds of people and therefore the neighborhoods are characterized in some degree by socioeconomic factors.

#### **5.2.3.5 Gender**

Between the genders in Finland and the Netherlands there are some gender specific behaviors, but also similarities. Men's and women's clothing is different due to the different body structure but not because of different roles. In general women purchase more clothing than men, and still many wives buy clothing for their men and decide what he wears. Women's decision making is somewhat longer and more complex than men's. A typical older man easily makes the purchase decision in the shop if the clothing fits, looks good and it is in the right price category. It was mentioned also that older men are more brand loyal than women (Puntila 17.03.2008). Women consider more factors and different items before forming a perception of it and purchasing it. This somewhat longer decision making process may be largely caused by a wider clothing offering and higher confrontation to fashion advertising. Women have also exceptionally similar expectations of certain body image combined with psychological factors. Therefore different ideals how a woman should look like, the expectations of peer groups, family members and other social groups combined with in a huge variety of choices may increase the difficulty of decision making. In general men's and women's clothing has become similar in the recent years, which can be seen especially among the younger generations. It is a global phenomenon that young men are increasingly interested in clothing, brands and outlook and make decisions on their own. They even go shopping with other male friends, whereas few years ago men bought clothing with their girlfriend or mother. This seems to be an international development and this is also visible in the target countries.

#### **5.4.3 Lifestyle groups**

As described in the previous chapter people are classifiable according to the established socio-cultural criteria of class, religion, age, ethnic background, etc. Today however, while such traditional socio-cultural classifiers still exist, they no longer prove sufficient



in describing, characterizing and classifying identity. People's true identities are rooted in less easily articulated differences in attitude, vision, philosophy, desire and dreams – what is called lifestyles, tribes or communities. Lifestyle groups are combinations of sociodemographic factors, ideals, values, philosophies and desires and are thus not only dependable on one's background but also on desired ideals in life. These lifestyle groups are reflected through peer groups, music, hobbies, attitudes, ideologies and other interests. Typical for current society is that these groups are small, like tribes and one person can belong to several lifestyle groups at the same time. Even though individualism is high in Western countries people have a big need to belong to a certain group, community or tribe. Tribes and communities use products and material objects for distinguishing themselves from other groups but also in order to show group membership. These communities can also be global, connected through internet in which the group membership is enhanced. Therefore global fashion companies and brands are not focused on national identities but on tribal identities – living in the streets of little groups or subgroups (Straatman 05.12.2007). Congruent with Ko et al. (2007) international fashion brands benefit and seem to target consumers that hold the same values and ideologies around the world and it is therefore possible to outline some cross-cultural consumer groups.

Market Research Company GfK has studied women's fashion consumption in the Netherlands. They have been able to outline seven different female fashion consumer groups that differ from each other. The groups are: Comfort, Correct, Feminine, Street, Trendy, Well-cared and Uncomplicated (Van Bakel 05.02.2008). The comfort and correct groups are the largest consumer groups, which might be explained also on their age structure which is from 50 years upwards. These groups value safe style which is more casual with the comfort group. With men GfK has not done such a classification, but one can assume similar kinds of groups like comfort, trendy and correct to occur among others. These identified groups also reveal that trendy and street groups include mainly the younger consumers, when comfort and correct have older women. Also preferred shops and brands can be identified among the groups: when the trendy group purchases clothing from fast fashion chains, the correct group prefers cheap retailers.

In comparison to the Sinus Milieu lifestyle typology (Tromsdorff 2004), the German

feminine clothing style groups - old-fashioned, conventionalist, fashion enthusiastic, casual, in need for prestige and non-conformist - have somewhat similar characters, but it is impossible to compare them explicitly to each other due to different typological methods. In general one can notice that these style groups vary between casual vs. correctness; the degree of fashionability and the appreciation towards the status in dress.

These findings on clothing consumer groups demonstrate that it is possible to classify people on lifestyle groups. Within a group people dress very similar but the groups distinguish themselves clearly from each other. The above mentioned groupings are one example of a nationwide classification, but these lifestyle groupings can be identified on a company level or even on a collection level. It depends on the company's needs and offering how specific groups need to be identified and hence targeted.

Lifestyle groups are to a degree universal and partly local. There is always the national impact on the formation and size of lifestyle groups. For instance in Finland heavy metal music and gothic music are for some reason more popular than in the Netherlands. In Finland it is common to see a gothic person dressed in black and spikes but in the Netherlands one sees them very seldom. There are thus groups who are globally spread and look almost the same around the world with a different twist. So the lifestyles of people arise from and are affected by the surrounding culture and people but also by global phenomena.

## ***5.2 Perceptual components of clothing***

In the following sections the specific perceptual components of clothing is discussed; clothing as a visual object, symbolism, brand value and relation to fashion. The aim is to get an understanding of the object itself in general but also the differences between cultures.

### **5.2.1 Style signification**

Where earlier the purchase of clothing was a bigger investment and consumers emphasized good quality, nowadays one could compare some clothing to fast moving



consumer goods, which are bought (sometimes also very impulsively), consumed and thrown away with low involvement. However there is a difference to high fashion brands which are high involvement products. When consumers buy clothing, they very seldom buy an entire outfit but purchase single items which they match with and add to their existing clothing at home. In principal consumers should be thinking how the new piece of clothing matches with the existing ones and how it changes or maintains the overall style of the clothing stock. The reality is often though different when decisions are based on feelings, pleasure, rapid decision making and one piece of clothing may be purchased just because it is perceived attractive or in fashion. Many people are not able to apply long-term thinking to build up a wardrobe in which one finds different options in the long run, but changing clothes takes place in a shorter cycle.

How do the consumers choose and prefer for certain clothing when variety of things are available and accepted? From different styles consumers choose items which symbolize most precisely their identity or which they would like to symbolize their identity. This symbolic identity construction and display is the underlying factor for clothing consumption and change in styles. Previously it was one's background (social class, race, gender etc.) which defined one's identity and therefore the style of clothing. Nowadays the consumer has the freedom to choose and construct one's identity and even to change it every day.

*The symbolic layer of clothing is the only factor that is interesting nowadays. It is not anymore that something is beautiful because many clothes are not beautiful but you buy them anyways because they have the right meaning. (Straatman 05.12.2007)*

In the interviews clothing professionals often emphasized the identity construction of clothing and its symbolic value. However when examining consumers' perception of clothing, it is more practical and less individualistic. GfK Market Research has found out that about 23 % of the Dutch women are indifferent between styles (Van Bakel 05.02.2008). When these women were asked to rate different clothing styles, they liked everything and can not prefer any particular style in specific. They base their clothing purchase decision on the opinion of the sales clerk in the shop, friends, price and current offering among others. This can imply two things: these people are late adopters and laggards, who wear styles that they see on other people, or/and that there is a multitude

of different styles in fashion. If there was a homogeneous style in the society, these women would prefer that one. Now when the variety is large and everything is possible, it is complicated for some women to know what looks good and what not.

When analyzing how consumers perceive the clothing item one can distinguish between the style and the brand, which are two different systems of signification. On the one hand there is the style or design of the clothing such as pattern, color, cut and line. On the other hand there is the sign system of a brand/designer name which is compressed through stories and images such as logo and marketing communications into the garment. It is difficult to generalize whether Finnish and Dutch consumers signify more between the style or the brand. It seems to depend on the lifestyle of the person. In the next two chapters the clothing style and design as well as brands are discussed and compared between the target countries.

### 5.2.2 Preferred elements of clothing

When it comes to the elements of clothing there are certain characteristics that are preferred by the mass in the target countries. Interestingly these preferences are very similar between the target countries; but these preferences were clearer when describing a typical Finn. Only few respondents found it impossible to define a typical Finnish way of clothing, and it was mainly among younger respondents. The typical Dutch way of clothing was found more often difficult to describe and many interviewees were reluctant to answer, because they just could not define it due to high diversity. Also many respondents mentioned Dutch consumers' strong-mindedness and individuality. People just wear it and do not necessarily consider that much what other people think about it or if it goes together.

Despite of the problems with generalizations in the Netherlands, the most often described characteristics of a typical way of clothing were similar in both countries: **casual, practical, comfortable, functional, not eye-catching and sportive** (mentioned in both countries by more than two interviewees, not in order of significance). In addition in the Netherlands natural and informal were used terms when in Finland clear lines, simple, easy and calm were mentioned as well. In both countries the clothing should not be difficult to maintain, or very decorative. Clothing is neither a way to show



status or jump out at crowd. These preferences conform also to typical shoe preferences. These aspects are typical for the majority of people, but there are always subgroups that may prefer just the opposite elements in clothing.

An interesting aspect was found within the preferred colors. Several respondents in Finland and the Netherlands mentioned that North-European consumers prefer bright and clear basic colors instead of mixed “uncolors” that are more typical to Southern and Eastern Europe. Also black and grey were mentioned as preferred colors. These colors are calm, easy to match and do not catch attention that much. In Finland almost all respondents mentioned in specific the color blue as a typical Finnish color. Some years ago the blue color was so important that if clothing retailers did not include it in the offering, it was said to be a financial catastrophe. The reason for this preference was unclear but many interviewees thought that blue color is easy to match, perceived correct and was mentioned to suit many fair-skinned Finnish consumers. Some people mentioned also its symbolism to the blue color in the national flag as well as to lakes, sea and sky. Few respondents in the Netherlands mentioned orange as a typical Dutch color. The orange for Dutch people in general is less important it is found in Dutch people’s closets and it is worn on special occasions such as national celebration days and sport events, when people want to show their Dutch identity.

Blue and orange symbolize nationality among others and are therefore preferred in that specific country. National colors in general have a special meaning to its country and can be seen in increased preference for that color. One cannot say that by offering especially these colors one could ensure market success, but their symbolism needs to be taken into consideration. In particular the physical environment - whether it is nature, architecture or weather - can have an influence on general preference for certain colors or lines. People tend to like colors and forms which they have seen before and with which they are surrounded.

### **5.2.3 Fashion brands**

*Fashion and brand is image. It has nothing to do with what you wear; it is how you buy and what you buy. But you see it also in high fashion, like Gucci and Prada. It has nothing to do with style anymore. It is branding. (Verdonck 18.12.2007)*

*A brand tells more than a style but only for those people who know the brand and are able to read the signs. One needs a common language for it. One can e.g. see the price in the brand. Brands are messages about its wearer. (Hiltunen 13.03.2008)*

Brands' role in fashion business is increasingly important. Nowadays it is very often the brand that has more value than the actual object because it is able to tell more than the product itself. The clothing items convey philosophy and lifestyle by holding a designer or brand name. Symbolic brand value of clothing seems to be the main thing that matters: it goes sometimes beyond the object, its usefulness and even in some cases over the monetary value. Finnish and Dutch consumers seem to understand brand's meaning in a very similar kind of a way. Finnish and Dutch interviewees mentioned a brand most often to be a **quality sign** or a guarantee of quality. In addition an attractive brand was mentioned to be **contemporary**, and to respond to the needs and values of its target consumer in specific. Brands in Finland and the Netherlands were not used to show status and showing brand logos clearly in a big way was seen as "showing off" type of behavior. Brands with a functional value seem to do better within the majority of Finnish and Dutch consumers, than brands with highly social, symbolic or sensory image. However, as mentioned in the previous chapters there are subcultures whose attitude towards brands differ greatly from each other.

In general a designer name was seen less significant than a brand name. It was suggested in the interviews that actually quite few consumers know the designers behind the brand. Those consumers who know the designers are very informed of them and follow fashion more than an average consumer. For a "normal" consumer it is more important to remember the retailer brand in order to shop in the right place. However famous fashion designers have an impact as well, which was seen in Finland and the Netherlands when H&M launched a collection with a famous fashion designer. Fashion and design conscious consumers literally run in the shops to get a piece of a unique, a luxury high fashion designer item for an affordable price.

Country of origin of a brand was not mentioned to have a big impact on the consumer's perception. Consumers seem to be aware that much of the clothing is produced in Asia



or other cheap labor countries and the brand owner's origin is more important one.

Current famous clothing brands have guaranteed their success very much with lifestyle concepts. These lifestyle concepts have gone to children's wear, jewelers, accessories, shoes, interior design, mobile phones and services. However consumers are nowadays less loyal to one brand but use multiple brands which hold similar kind of styles or ideologies. Consumers can purchase and display their values with all kinds of cultural products, which have certain philosophy ideal and image. The way of dressing, living, eating and drinking is part of fashion nowadays and fashion is not about garments anymore but total concepts. Next the whole system which enhances trend adoption and fashion trade is discussed and compared between the target countries.

### ***5.3. Fashion system and communication***

Fashion may be seen by one consumer as a nice playground but by other as a huge uncertainty. Most of the consumers want to be up-to-date, but many do not have the capability to do it by self, thus they are highly influenced by and rely on the fashion system, which advises on them what to wear. The fashion systems as such tries to keep people interested in fashion and to use it, but this system is also important for the industry itself. (Gorski 17.03.2008) The producers need to create some sort of a trend for colors or cuts in order maintain mass production and being able to offer demanded things at the right time. What one consumer perceives fashionable at one time, another consumer may perceive it unfashionable. For one person H&M offers most fashionable items when another person thinks Haute Couture is the only fashionable clothing. One can also question whether consumers distinguish between clothing and fashion anymore, when the cheapest clothing might be the most fashionable one in the market. In the following the major influencers of fashion system are described and finally the communication mechanism is analyzed.

#### **5.3.1 Perceived fashionability**

As described earlier there are multiple styles, designs, clothes and brands available in the market. All these styles are operating in some level of fashion adoption curve. Some styles are mature ones and others in the beginning of the adoption cycle. When

consumers consider purchasing new clothing they are influenced by the perceived fashionability of the particular style or garment. This perception is formed in the society and by the fashion system, and it influences how popular a certain style is.

Consumers differ when it comes to accepting new styles. Since there are endless possibilities for consumers to construct their identity with clothing it is not experienced by all the consumers as liberating but more as a constraint. This is due to socialization and differentiation forces. (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002) There are people who are always driven by change and want to change style when it is commonly accepted. Then there are people who do not dare to wear new styles but adopt them when they are socially accepted. So when consumers are purchasing clothing they reflect it to their own identity in relation to their social setting. Fashion innovators are driven by the differentiation force and late adopters by the socialization force, but both have the ultimate need to be fashionable, up to date. (Cholachatpinyo et al. 2002) Fashion and styles are gradually changing, because people do not like to stick with traditions, not even the late laggards. The majority of consumers do not want to follow fashion literally and to keep up with every single trend, nor do they want to be perceived unfashionable.

The levels of fashion adoption differ also between countries and cultures. Western countries have usually fast fashion adoption level, which was found also in Finland and in the Netherlands. The mentality of people favors for change and there is an infrastructure which enables new influences. New trends can be seen in real time, and they usually arrive to the country fast but very marginally. Even though new trends are available, it takes usually one to two years when the mass adapts the new style (Frigren 19.03.2008). Therefore one cannot say that if a country is adapting new trends fast, everybody would adapt them fast, but it takes place gradually from innovators to adopters. The fashion diffusion does not always follow the classical bell curve, but a fashion may emerge and disappear several times in its whole life cycle. In the first year the trend may occur shortly within a small group of people and then disappear for a while. The following year it may occur as a bigger trend and disappear again and finally after two years it may come as a mainstream trend when it is seen widely in the shops and it is adopted by the mass (Frigren 19.03.2008). Therefore the market distribution



structure which was discussed earlier has an impact on the speed and wideness of fashion adoption as well. Companies targeting for mass consumers come always a bit late in bringing new fashions in the market, because their consumers need more time to accept new trends.

In some cases some specific trends or styles do not arrive into all countries at all. In the interviews it became clear that also within North Europe styles and trends differ within countries. Therefore the emergence of short term flops and fads is dependent more on local subcultures, lifestyles and the local fashion system. Global megatrends affect the general large shift in fashion consumption and preferences and therefore its impact can be seen more broadly in different markets.

In the Netherlands and Finland the consumer fashion market can be divided to innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. It is difficult to calculate the exact percentages for each adopter group and the line between the groups is not clear. However it can be concluded that the fashion innovators in Finland and the Netherlands are a small portion (about 5 %) of the population (Tap 06.02.2008) and the mass market is the biggest clothing consumer group so in volume as well as in value. The fashion innovators who are into high fashion go usually to neighboring countries to buy the latest items. They do not wait that it arrives to home country but get it elsewhere. Optionally they make or modify and combine the clothing themselves. The fashion followers are not relying on their own inspiration when clothing themselves. They see what other people are wearing and adjust to the common trend if they find it suitable also for themselves. The ever growing supermarket of styles is not helping them to choose what to wear, so they rely on external sources of the fashion system which is discussed in the next chapter.

### **5.3.2 Fashion interpreters**

Fashion interpreters are national and international people, places and media which interact between the fashion and consumers; showing what is in and what is not, what to wear in general and what suits for certain body-types. Therefore they are influencing consumers' clothing perception and behavior. Their role in the society is big since they

affect the opinions of the majority of consumers. In order fashion to exist there needs to be these fashion interpreters who transcript the fashion created by high fashion innovators for the wider population.

**Media** have played a vital role in shaping fashion into the complex cultural phenomenon it has become. **Television** is one of the most important media channels for fashion. Magazines reach people who are interested in fashion, but television reaches also the mass market. Currently there is also increased number of fashion and lifestyle programs in TV in both countries. In these programs people get advised on their look and style. These programs increase the overall interest towards fashion and clothing and communicate that in current society it is in fashion to be in fashion and even men can do it.

Fashion **magazines** are the second major media for communicating the mass what is in and what to wear. Majority of the magazines are targeted for women, but there starts to be more lifestyle magazines also for men. These magazines are filled with global fashion companies' and luxury brands' advertisements, but especially in Finland the fashion journalists' own articles are the most influential ones to consumers (Kanerva 26.03.2008 and Puntila 17.03.2008). In these articles the newest trends in clothing, make-up, hair, accessories, gadgets and other lifestyle products are described and presented. They advise and show what to wear and what not to wear, and what suits for what kind of a body type. Also style transformations are especially popular within the readers. Perhaps the global fashion brand's own advertisements are seen too remote from own life and identity and therefore the journalists' ideas are more suitable for the readers. Often luxury brands have a celebrity advertising the products and brand and it is perceived that these magazines show very unanimous ideal body type across cultures. It seems that ideal beauty is very much built around white, thin and sexy woman.

Electronic media and **internet** is making the diffusion of trends faster. One can see the latest fashion shows real time and one does not need to live in fashion capital to see new trends. It is also a place where people can display their own identities and clothing. Especially among young people there are websites where one can display own clothing pictures and see others' (Hiltunen 13.03.2008). In Finland for example [tyylitaivas.fi](http://tyylitaivas.fi)



(Tyylitaivas 2008) gathers young girls to take pictures of self, placing the pictures in the internet and commenting on other people's dresses. There are also bloggers who maintain fashion blog in which they display their clothing and their unique style to others. This is especially typical among young consumers, and it can be linked in their identity construction and search for acceptance, but also on their different media usage patterns. They seem to be more active in creating and commenting fashion media than just following it.

In the Netherlands especially **stylists** were mentioned to be nowadays very important in interpreting styles. They act between the clothing and consumers by bringing the clothing to the market together with the designer. Almost half of the Dutch interviewees mentioned stylists important in the fashion adoption, while in Finland none of the interviewees mentioned them. This might be explained by the fact that Finland is still quite a young fashion consumption country, and there has not been a need for that kind of profession yet. Fashion journalists in the press in Finland seem to do a part of the job of stylists. On the other hand stylists also make clothing differentiate from others, why it might be seen key factor in hardly competitive Dutch market. Sometimes the stylists have more influence on how certain clothing(s) are presented than the actual designer; however without the designers stylists could not do their job. The term stylist is therefore contemporary and sort of an outcome of the whole fashion system. Stylists work in different media, fashion houses, runways and photo shoots. There are some famous stylists in the Netherlands who instruct the mass how to dress and what to wear in TV and magazines and may even have an own clothing collection. Often fashion magazines and high fashion are seen too extravagant and not down to earth by the mass, so stylists make it understandable. Consumers do not need to use own imagination for figuring out what is stylish and what goes together.

**Shops** and shopping areas around the Europe have some certain similar dynamics. High fashion shops are usually clustered in the same neighborhood, artistic shops in to own area and the mainstream shops in to the very centre of the city. These areas catch customers of their kind. The offering in the shops and fashion purchasers were mentioned to highly influence what people wear in Finland. The highlighted emphasis of purchasers can be explained due to the market distribution structure in Finland in

which supermarkets' and department stores' have centralized purchasers. The store offering in specific has a major impact on the mass market that purchases clothing when they see it in the shop. Consumers do not necessarily search for any special clothing item or style but go into a shop and see what is available. Even if the consumer has an awareness of a new style and would like to buy it, they wait until the item is in the shops. Fashion innovators thus do not necessarily wait the new style to be in the shops, but get it elsewhere.

Every big city has a main shopping area which is occupied by the major local and global fashion retailers. These streets are also catwalks for consumers, where one can be seen and where one can see other people and new trends. The street is the physical and symbolic place in which styles, tastes and habits diffuse and where popular in-crowd cultures and trends emerge. Seeing other people wearing some style or clothing is more influential than seeing the same piece of clothing hanging in the shop. It is easier to get convinced with new styles when they are seen on someone. It might be a celebrity, friend or a stranger on the street. When a new style is seen on a person it is personified. This personification seems to be important one in enhancing fashions to emerge and diffuse. Additionally not all consumers know how to wear a new style, but seeing it first on someone, it becomes understandable and adaptable.

Finally when a culturally and socially important person (i.e. **celebrity**) shares his/her view on certain style or clothing, consumers may accept new things easier. Their opinion is socially accepted and valued. Each consumer group gave their own role models and opinion leaders. They are important intermediaries in fashion diffusion because they are under public eye and they can be seen in different media. There are people, especially youngsters, who follow celebrities' clothing style and adapt it to own style or copy it completely

### **5.3.3 Communication**

The consumer's perception formation process has lot to do with communication between different parties. In the fashion consumption process there are two areas where communication takes place. The first one is between the fashion object or brand and the



consumers. The fashion company or designer communicates with clothing certain messages which get their enhanced meaning via fashion intermediaries. Like in brand formation the brand identity is communicated to the consumer and the consumer forms an image in his/her mind. The identity is transformed into an image in the consumers head. The product is just one part of the brand identity communication, thus important one, especially when it comes to visible clothing.

The second place of communication takes place between consumers. Consumers communicate with their clothing styles things about their identity and values, and make distinction to other consumers. With style one can communicate things about self to those who can read it (Frigren 19.03.2008). Many people read the signs unconsciously and form an image of the person based on the outlook. This interaction between consumers helps consumers to identify with people but also to distinguish from others. This second area of communication is as important as the first one, because here people identify themselves into groups, which may not literally even exist. Here also the socialization and differentiation forces take place. So when we consider consumers' role in the fashion perception process, they function as receivers of the clothing and brand signals but also as the channel for the symbolic messages. One can regard consumers acting as a channel like TV or magazines when they wear clothing and display it to the environment. The communication between consumers happens between two kinds of people (roughly); the fashion innovators and fashion adopters. They both are influenced by each other but the outcome of that influence is different. It is the differentiation feeling with innovators and socialization feeling with adopters.

The fashion society consists of symbolic objects (i.e. clothing and fashion), fashion interpreters, and consumers who interact with each other and make the fashion diffusion work. Products and brands convey signs which are aimed to attract consumers and respond to their needs. Trend forecasters try to identify the gradual changes in consumers; companies incorporate the trends in product qualities; fashion system interpret and enhance the meanings; which consumers finally use in order to communicate their identities, to distinguish from others, to enhance group membership and to feel up-to-date. In fact this whole process starts from and ends to consumers (and society in whole).

#### ***5.4. Other contextual factors***

Finally there are two external forces, the meaning of special occasions and natural habitat, that were found to shape the consumer behavior in the target countries in specific. These influencers in the environment are external forces that were found in both countries significant but the outcome of the impact seems to differ slightly.

Special occasions and contexts determine what kind of clothing consumers start to look for and what they perceive suitable for the occasion. There are socially established expectations and norms to clothing. Work, formal occasions, sports and other activities are examples of when people are aware that they are expected to wear certain kind of clothing, color or style because it is a socially established norm, but also because it is practical for that occasion in some cases. If people would not cloth themselves according to the expected norm, it would offend other people. Work and sport clothing in the target countries had very similar characters, but a difference was found in the concept of formal occasion. For Finns it is typical to dress up for formal occasions (such as birthday, funeral and wedding) when Dutch people cloth themselves very casual. An explicit reason for this difference in formal occasion dressing is difficult to give. It seems that the Dutch casualness has also reached formal occasions and it has become socially more accepted.

The physical environment has an impact on consumers as well, which was also mentioned earlier. One can say that the weather plays a restricting role on consumers in Finland and the Netherlands. In Finland especially the winter clothing is bought for its protective reason and not necessarily of its symbolic or decorative reason. This is reflected especially in shoes which need to be protective, warm and functional. Similarly rainy weather in the Netherlands sets some functional and protective needs. Even though people would like to wear a nice dress or shoes, often the weather is determining the way of clothing. People do go outside in both countries and therefore the clothing needs to be suitable for the climate. This was found also in people's mindset, that they more seldom buy and wear expensive fragile clothing which might get destroyed by bad weather. When studying country specific clothing behavior, the natural habitat is the most obvious influencer across countries.



## ***5.5 Analysis of consumer perception formation***

In this chapter the relation between socio-cultural influences and consumer perception formation are presented and analyzed. Generalizations on consumer perception formation and specifics in Finland and the Netherlands are described. It was needed to adjust somewhat the original framework; hence the revised theoretical framework is presented at the end.

### **5.5.1 Relations between socio-cultural factors and clothing perception**

Based on the discussion of clothing fashion perception and behavior in Finland and the Netherlands it could be concluded that many of the preliminary suggestions on socio-cultural impact on clothing preference were found congruent. First of all when examining the current situation in the target markets the situation was found to be quite different. There is though a sign that these markets are converging but due to different historical development the markets still have their unique characters and consequently shape consumer perception and behavior. The studied cultural values, which were divided into three value synthesis in chapter 3.3.7 set a framework for clothing preference which was found to be very similar between the target countries. Subcultural dimensions define the preference further and it is possible to outline different preferences based on the subcultural dimensions.

In general the consumer's clothing perception formation was found to work in a same way in both countries. The fashion system is also consisting of similar institutions whose centrality or power in the system thus differs. In both countries clothing is used for basic protective needs but it has a highly increasing meaning in identity construction and differentiation, which varies also among different consumer groups.

In more detail, the list of the similarities and differences in Finland and the Netherlands are presented below in table 7.

**Table 7. Major similarities and differences in clothing styles, preferences, consumption and behaviour between Finnish and Dutch consumers**

Fashion market characteristics	Similarities	Differences	
		Finland	The Netherlands
Development and structure of fashion distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many international players, fewer national companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concentrated and centralized distribution structure</li> <li>Markets and department stores have relatively large share</li> <li>Young fashion consumption country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversified distribution structure</li> <li>Older fashion consumption country</li> </ul>
Degree of competition		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>
Degree and characteristics of offering		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relatively moderate variety of offering</li> <li>Consumption very often base on the availability of clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Larger variety of clothing offering</li> <li>Fierce price competition</li> <li>Price discounts common</li> </ul>
Cultural values	Similarities	Differences	
		Finland	The Netherlands
Individualism & autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everything is in fashion and consumer is free to choose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safer individualistic clothing according to collectively accepted norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Braver established ways of dressing</li> </ul>
Low power distance & egalitarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No status dressing</li> <li>Modesty and functionality in style</li> <li>Luxury brands and high fashion not commonly used</li> </ul>		
Harmony & Feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No gender roles specific dressing</li> <li>Women can choose their own clothing, no difference to men</li> </ul>		
Subcultures and lifestyles	Similarities	Differences	
		Finland	The Netherlands
Social class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher income increases fashion consumption and brand awareness in general</li> <li>Within lower income classes fashion and brands important for some people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Big middle class unifies consumption habits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More diverse social class structure</li> </ul>



Younger generations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most fashion and brand oriented</li> <li>• Faster changing of styles</li> <li>• Strong conformity to peer groups</li> <li>• Strong identity construction and display with clothing</li> <li>• Create own media</li> </ul>		
Older generations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold the biggest financial resources and the most free time</li> <li>• Also a need to be fashionable</li> <li>• Psychological age determines preference and clothing style</li> <li>• Consumption habits learned 30-40 years ago</li> <li>• Critical, demand for quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased demand for suitable cuts in clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased demand for suitable length and cuts in clothing</li> </ul>
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women more confronted and interested in fashion and clothing</li> <li>• Women base more often decisions on emotions and feelings</li> <li>• Men have more practical needs towards clothing</li> <li>• Young men exception: they are more like young women in clothing consumption</li> </ul>		
Ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic background shown in the dress when identity is based on that</li> <li>• Religion restricts dressing in some cases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer ethnic groups and low number of them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many ethnic groups and high number of them</li> </ul>
Geographical location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban areas more trendy and fashionable</li> <li>• In the countryside demand for practical clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinction only between the big cities and countryside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bigger differences between cities, geographical regions and suburbs</li> </ul>
Style conformity to identification groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconscious identification to people: reading signs everywhere and reflecting the styles to self</li> <li>• Influence of peer groups and society as whole</li> </ul>		

Fashion interpreters and diffusion	Similarities	Differences	
		Finland	The Netherlands
Main influencer in the fashion system for consumer awareness and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media (magazines, TV, internet)</li> <li>Shops</li> <li>Global and local celebrities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purchasers</li> <li>Fashion journalists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stylists: in TV, internet and magazines and personal styling</li> </ul>
Fashion diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diffuses from innovators (about 5 % of the market) to adopters</li> <li>Usually mass market adopts a new style in one to two years</li> </ul>		
Product components	Similarities	Differences	
		Finland	The Netherlands
Brand meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brands are a quality sign and contemporary</li> <li>Show that a person is "up-to-date" in own social environment</li> <li>Functional brand images perform better</li> <li>Showing status with highly symbolic brands is common only within marginal groups and it may also be a short-term trend</li> </ul>		
Characteristics of a preferred style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Casual, comfortable, practical, sporty, functional, not eye-catching, not decorative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very congruent view among interviewees on typical clothing</li> <li>Only among young respondents (under 30) it was found more difficult to characterize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In general more difficult to characterize; many interviewees could not generalize any specific style</li> </ul>
Preferred colors in clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modest basic colors and seasonal trend colors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preference for blue color in different tints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Orange a national color</li> </ul>

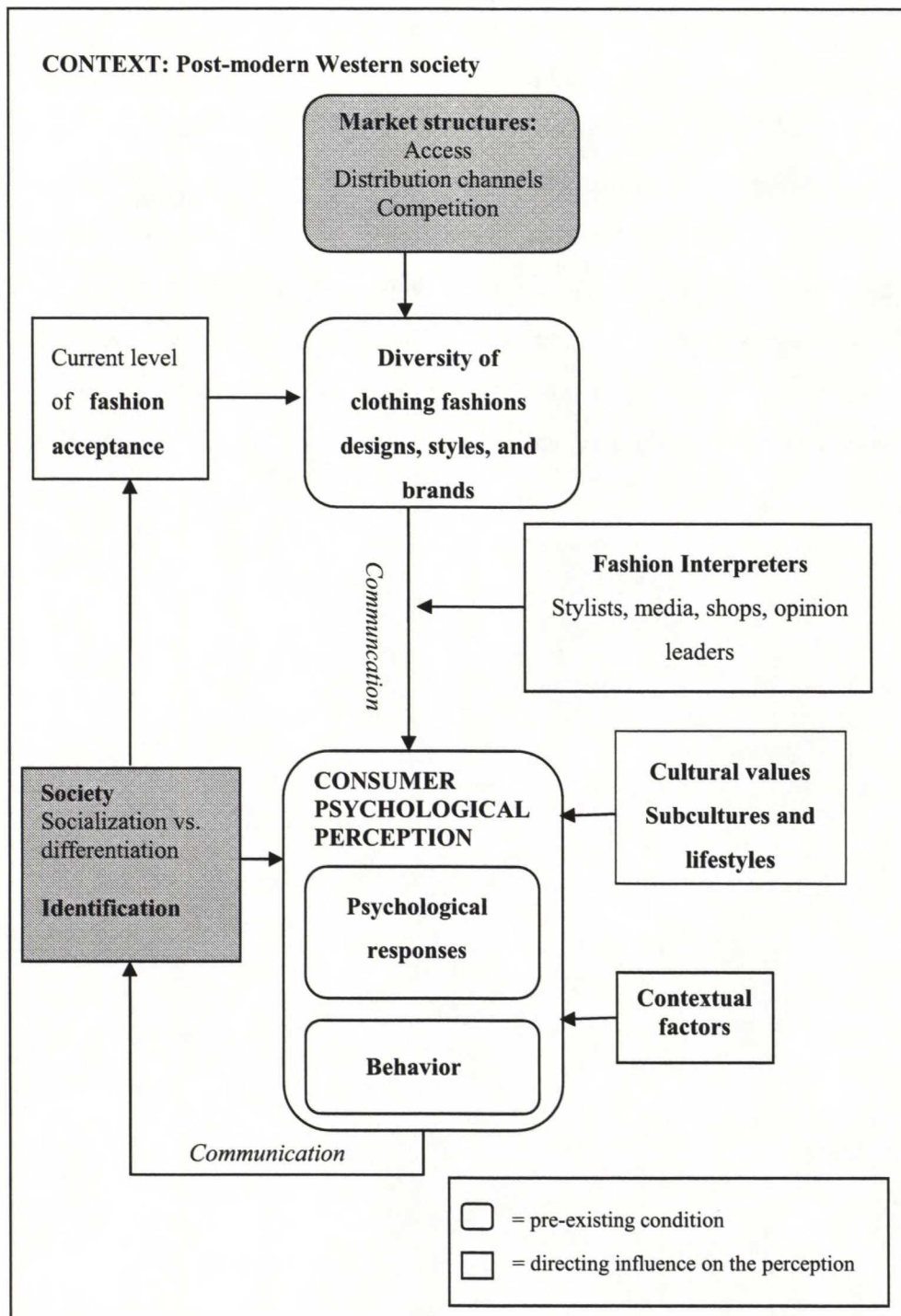
### 5.5.2 Revised theoretical framework

The original purpose of this research was to study the product design of clothing. However it came very clear in the beginning that the clothing object is more than just the design, it is also style, meaning and communication. Therefore it was decided to revise the original theoretical framework and adjust it to the findings of the empirical research.



In the beginning there is the fashion object or actually a variety of different fashions, styles, design and brands each operating in a different market level and fashion adoption stage. Due to the highly discussed converging economic systems in Europe, it was assumed that Finland and the Netherlands would have same conditions for clothing and fashion trade. However, when the market structures were examined, it was noticed that these are not the same and consequently have a major but indirect implication to consumer preferences. Therefore *market structure* is included into the framework. It impacts the variety and nature of clothing and fashion trade in the country and therefore indirectly the overall fashion perception. Fashion can be seen as a part of politics, it is also a question of general appreciation of and investments in fashion trade, which is defined by the culture. Culture as a concept is defining the overall perception formation and the variables in it. These two components – market structure and clothing offering - set the basis for consumer perception formation.

Second, it was discovered that even though a consumer can choose his or her identity and change it and decide in which groups belong to, there are *identification* groups or people whose opinion is influential. In order to emphasize the impact of the society and people on consumers' perception formation *society* is added into the framework. The clothing perception and behavior is always influenced by the other people's presence. People are always comparing themselves with others and reading symbolic signs from visual clothing: when adopting new styles or when changing styles. It can be a friend, parent, spouse, colleague, sales clerk or stranger on the street who does not belong to one's lifestyle group but still influences the consumer by saying an opinion or displaying his or her clothing. The society as a whole is characterized by socialization and differentiation forces which make the fashion change and distinguish people between innovators and adopters. Even though people have access to the latest trends and fashion shows via internet, the adoption is usually triggered by the influence of a person. The style or clothing gets personified and socially acceptable when it is worn by someone. If the majority of consumers reject a certain style or design, it flops. However if the majority of consumers purchase the style it becomes a common trend or fashion.



**Figure 12. Revised theoretical framework**

The above revised framework is a general framework for clothing perception and shows the influence of socio-cultural factors on it. The perception formation of fashion innovators will certainly be different from fashion adopters. This study has not concentrated to study the psychological qualities of these people, but few general issues are raised. Fashion innovators' perception formation starts from a low level of adoption



of a style or clothing. The specific style or clothing might not even be available on the market yet. They are likely to be influenced rather by their own imagination than just by the clothing objects and would not follow fashion interpreters communication and advices on styles, because for them it might already be old fashion. They are likely to form a semantic interpretation of a new style, because when they see a new clothing or style, they know how to wear it. They are influenced by the society but in a different way. For them seeing everybody wearing the same accepted style makes them to change the style and differentiate from others. They start to seek a style which is new and different from others. When they find something and wear it, they in return impact the society by introducing a new style.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

It is time to summarize the study, present its main findings and to make contributions to previous research. The findings give rise to some managerial implications and also raise interest towards some future research areas and methods.

### ***6.1 Summary of the main findings and theoretical contribution***

In order to assess, if the objectives of the study are met, it seems necessary to restate the research questions of the study:

- Which socio-cultural factors influence the consumer response to clothing design and style, and how?
- What are the differences and similarities in the socio-culture (i.e. values, lifestyles, subcultures, prevailing style, symbolic meanings and consumer behaviour in general), that affect the preference for certain clothing in Finland and in the Netherlands?
- How does the fashion system influence consumer perception making?

It was found in the study that there are several macro factors in the environment, arising from the culture, that influence consumer perception making and preference for clothing design, style and brand. These influences are:

- the market and distribution structure,
- cultural values,
- society as whole,
- subcultures (especially age combined with gender, geographical location and ethnic background),
- lifestyles,
- the fashion system and
- contextual factors (physical environment and special occasions)

The perception formation process and the major influencers are presented in figure 12 and the major similarities and differences in table 7. Even though in the beginning the market specific structures were left out of investigation, they were found to have an impact on the clothing supply and thus indirectly influence consumer behaviour. The existing market structure is an expression of a specific kind of culture (Solomon 2002) and the diversity of market offering and distribution channel structure predetermine the



qualities of clothing that is supplied on the market.

One can conclude that *cultural values* have a great impact on clothing perception i.e. what kind of clothing, styles and brands are accepted in a culture. Even though Finland and the Netherlands differ from each other in historic and current economic condition of the market, the historical development of fashion trade, market distribution structure, and clothing expenditure - the overall style, the way of clothing oneself and appreciation towards luxury items was found to be very similar between the cultures, influenced a lot by the cultural values. In particular this study confirms the conclusions made by Roth (1995) and De Mooij & Hofstede (2002) of influence of power distance and masculinity on brand appreciation and status dressing. An appealing brand was by a large amount a quality sign in the target countries. Roth's (1995) finding of functional brand images' appreciation in low power distance culture is congruent with this study. However it was more difficult to point the individuality's impact as a cultural value on clothing due to the general trend of increased individualism in the world. Finland and the Netherlands are both individualistic cultures but sometimes the individuality may get an enhanced meaning because of global trends. Even though the Netherlands has been a wealthy nation since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the people's mentality towards clothing is still very functional. Weather, values, mentality, social structure and the culture as a whole have made and still keep the Dutch people very pragmatic dressers. In Finland the same factors including market structure determine the Finnish pragmatism.

The research on subcultural level revealed some congruencies with previous studies. *Social class* is a difficult variable in explaining fashion and clothing consumption since it is not explaining differences explicitly anymore. Rather it is the consumer's lifelong development that determines the appreciation towards clothing and design aspects.

*Age* was determining consumption in a very similar way in both countries. Congruent with Grant & Stephen (2005) young consumers in Finland and the Netherlands were found to be the most fashion and brand oriented, highly influenced by their peer group and family and they wanted their clothing to reflect their personality and self-image. Further the findings revealed also that young men are more similar to young women's behavior than within older generations and that youngsters are active media users; they

also want to display their identity and clothing in the media not only to receive images. Previous studies have found out that mature women continue to be fashion conscious, are ready and willing to spend high disposable income with those fashion retailers that can offer high quality service and supply a variety of quality garments with the tailoring and the designs to suit her needs (body size) and self image, but are facing a high-street retailer's lack of attention (Birtwistle & Tsim 2005). These findings are confirmed with this study. In addition, mature women's self image is based on psychological age rather than chronological age. Based on the age discussion, it was found out that older men differ from older women in their disinterest in clothing and fashion, thus young men were behaving more similar to young women.

The findings also reveal that *geographical locations* are defining the Dutch market into smaller segments than in Finland. Despite the small size of the country, cities, regional areas and suburbs have well established characteristics that differ from each other. In Finland thus the classification can be drawn between the biggest cities and countryside. In addition the influence of *ethnic background* is more visible among the Dutch consumers. These groups are highly visible in the Dutch society and their dressing is influenced by their ethnic identity. However the ethnicity in dress is related to individual identity construction, not to the degree of acculturation, since within both high and low level of acculturation ethnic identity is increasingly reflected in dress (Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer 2005).

In comparison to Finland one can state that the subcultures make the Dutch market more diversified. Finland is quite homogeneous, when only age (including gender with older generation) and geographical location determine the major differences in the Finnish society. The Dutch society is more diverse. That is why it might be difficult to consider an average Dutch consumer when there are different nationalities, cultures and religions in but also much greater freedom (or duty) for constructing self. One needs to doubt if a cultural value study is feasible to cover the whole Netherlands due to the high heterogeneity and diversity of people and structures. In addition, one needs to question the usability of Hofstede's value dimensions in specific. Hofstede's sample is not representative of the entire population, but of the middle classes employed in a multinational corporation (Roth 1995, 167). Therefore the large immigrant groups and



people with an ethnic background interfere in making generalizations of 'Dutch people'. The national and international *fashion interpreters* are in critical part in shaping the consumers' perception formation. They tell what to wear, what is "in" and which styles go together. The clothing itself and the fashion interpreters communicate current values and trends via the clothing. The severer competition in the Dutch clothing market can be seen in price competition and in the increased role of stylists among others. The reason for stylists' importance in the fashion system is due to bigger competition and development of the market. Stylists are used to bring clothing to the market and to 'sell' it. They are sometimes even more important than the designer. Due to the concentrated distribution structure in Finland the purchasers of supermarkets and department stores have a higher impact on the offering. Clothing companies who want to get a foothold in the Finnish clothing market need to get accepted by the purchasers. Additionally, fashion journalists in the press, are significant influencers in the fashion system in Finland.

The overall perception formation is about communication and interpretation of the signs. Consumers interact with each other on a large subcultural or lifestyle group level, but also on micro social level among peer groups, family and friends. When clothing is seen on someone, it gets a personal connection and meaning. People reflect themselves with others and think whether the style or clothing seen on someone would be something for self. Therefore the *social environments* are important ones in the diffusion of and preference for styles. The personification of a style might be one reason why the diffusion of fashions does not happen at the same time in urban and rural areas, even though nowadays people have same access to electronic media sources. The style gets accepted when it is seen on someone first.

Finally there are contextual factors that may in some cases impact the perception formation either early in the psychological response formation (affect or cognitive response formation) stage or later in the behavioral responses stage. Weather and physical environment determine a lot how people perceive and prefer things. Based on the response formation and the impact of influencing factors, the consumer forms a behavioral response, approach or avoidance, towards the clothing; and hence affects with own choice the other people and the acceptance of styles.

When assessing the overall results of the study, one could conclude with the words by Rens Tap (06.02.2008):

*The way of living is different compared to the South Europe, which is reflected also in the clothing. In the north Europe the weather, values, and preferences are more alike. Therefore one could say that there is a Northern European market in terms of colors, brands and design.*

On a general level one could indeed say that there is a North-European clothing cluster, but it depends on the company and products whether they can exploit the somewhat unified consumer needs, tastes and behavior.

## **6.2 Managerial implications**

What actions should then be taken in response to the strategic questions and what practical steps need to be taken to implement the strategic conclusions?

The use of existing cultural classifications (values, subcultures, lifestyles) are applicable on a general level but may be more relevant in comparing clearly divergent countries such as Western vs. non-Western country or South-European vs. North-European country. However the results showed a somewhat generalizable North-European market to exist, but it might be more feasible to target different lifestyle groups in the Netherlands whereas in Finland generalizations can be made in a more broad national level. In addition to higher homogeneity in Finland, the market is small and therefore it is difficult to reach economies of scale with a highly targeted niche-group and -products.

In general, when examining the adoption curves, companies need to identify their target customers in the adaptation curve, whether it is high or mass fashion. When assessing the success of high fashion and luxury brands, the target countries are not the most viable markets for them. The consumption for those kinds of high involvement, symbolic products is low and clearly targeted for a marginal group of people, who seem to have very cohesive global characteristics. One could say that due to the highly symbolic value of high fashion and luxury brands, it is feasible to have a global brand identity. This identity attracts marginal group of customers around the world, and therefore these companies can operate with a standardized products and brand strategy.



However when it comes to lower market segments, some adaptations are needed. If a company is targeting to a mass market there certainly will be more culture-specific preferences that need to be taken into consideration. The mass market in Finland and the Netherlands are very much alike, why adaptations are not necessarily needed. However, the distribution of mass market clothing and the significance of fashion interpreters differ in the countries, why companies need to target different parties in establishing operations and in creating awareness among consumers.

Even though the aim of this study was not to evaluate potential customer groups in detail, there is clearly one customer group in both countries that is not targeted by clothing and fashion producers. Women's mature markets have clear needs in terms of proper cuts and design elements that have not been targeted yet. Baby boomers are a highly potential consumer group in terms of financial resources and in terms of market size. There is a clear gap in the image how these consumers see themselves and how producers see them. Retailers that can adapt and respond to the needs of the mature woman will do well to tap into this lucrative market segment.

Finally one needs to keep in mind that fashion and clothing industries are not measurable in quantities or linear flow charts but they are a form of art that have become highly commercial. There seems to be a lack of understanding of the dynamics of the industry, why it may be difficult to grasp. The sensitiveness of fashion requires professionals with sensitiveness but also with commercial view. In Finland and in the Netherlands there could be even a stronger own fashion industry if there would be a higher cultural appreciation towards it. Fashion requires organizations, resources, marketing and an environment to operate, in addition to the educated designers, and when these are met, the fashion industry of its own can emerge.

*If you design a garment, you want people to wear it. If you want to hang it on a mannequin that is art, not fashion! As long as you want people to wear your garments – to express that feeling - it has an element of art, an element of design and an element of consideration of people who want to wear it (Portes 19.12.2008).*

### ***6.3 Suggestions for further research***

This study excluded all individual and psychological factors from the perception formation process. These factors will need to be studied in order to draw a complete framework of clothing perception formation. In addition research about fashion innovators and adopters and the differentiation and socialization forces need to be investigated in order to understand person-specific differences. Especially the difference between innovators and adopters and the percentages of these groups in different countries needs to be investigated because these types of people seem to have a different perception formation model.

As this study was qualitative in nature, the significance of different fashion interpreters could be tested in quantitative measures. In addition, the actual preferences of clothing design, style and brand variables between different consumers segments needs to be investigated in order to understand the consumer preferences profoundly. Finally, further design studies may need to be conducted in order to test the generalizability of the influencing factors and the fashion object in question. Especially products that use fashion components in product design could be reasonable to study.

Finally, this study aimed to get an understanding whether culturally closed countries can be grouped into European market clusters. The borders of North European market might not follow national borders, which became clear in investigating the South Netherlands. Therefore it seems reasonable to investigate if North Germany is closer to the Nordic cluster and South Netherlands closer to Latin countries such as Belgium.



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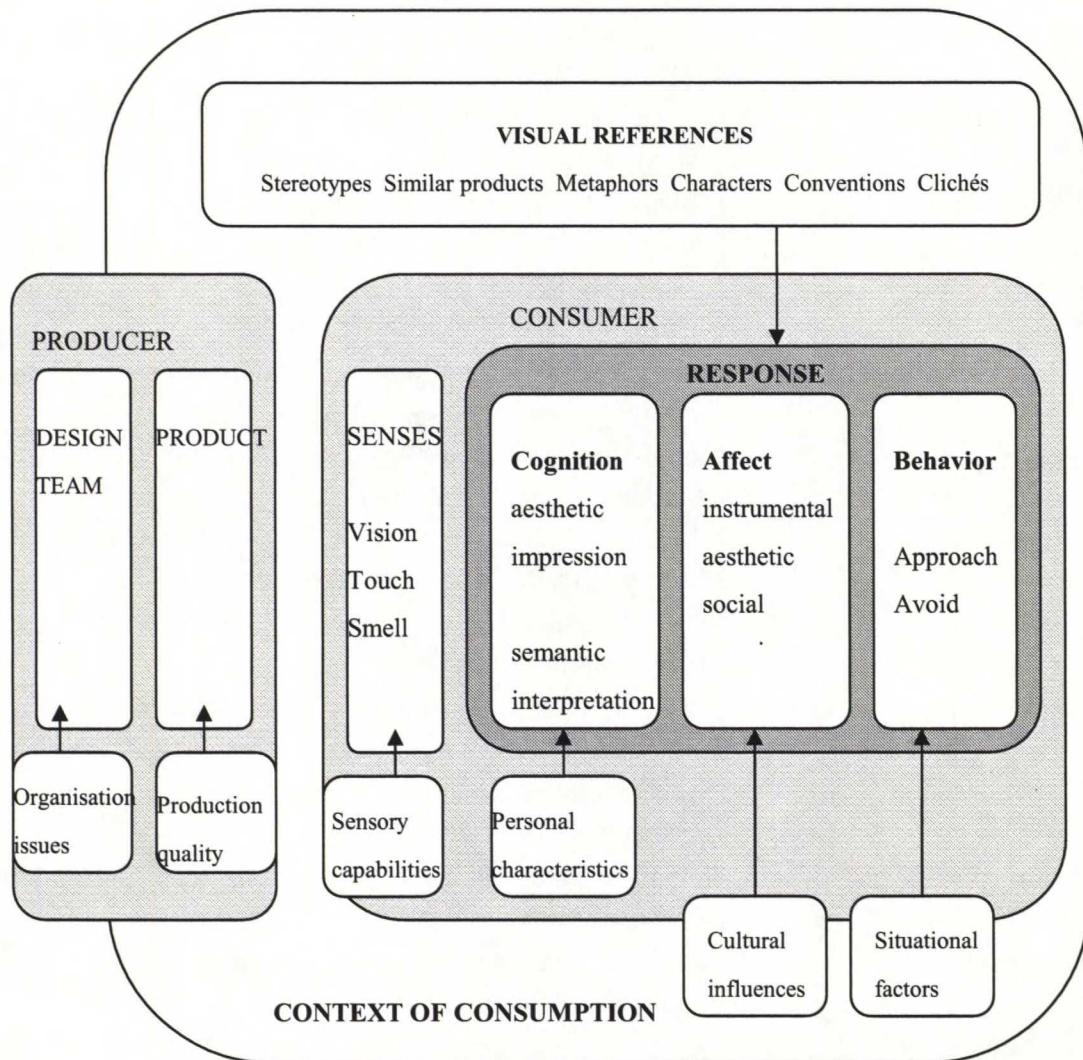
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Framework for consumer response to the visual domain in product design (Crilly et al. 2004, 569)





## Appendix 2. List of interviewees

<b>Yvonne van Bakel</b>	Account Manager, GfK, 05.02.2008 Dongen, the Netherlands
<b>Liliana Daniilis</b>	Color Advisor, 04.12.2007 Rotterdam the Netherlands
<b>Eevaliina Frigren</b>	Design Manager, Seppälä, 19.03.2008 Vantaa Finland
<b>Yrjö Gorski</b>	Managing Director, Association of Fashion Retailers, 17.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Enna Hiltunen</b>	Researcher, 15/30 Research Oy, 13.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Pirjo Hirvonen</b>	Professor Fashion Design, University of Art and Design Helsinki, 28.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Jukka Hukkataival</b>	Agent Filippa K Finland, Fi Aikon Oy, 26.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Larissa Hukkataival</b>	Sales Filippa K Finland, Fi Aikon Oy, 26.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Veera Kanerva</b>	PR-Officer and Agent Promostyl Finland, Trenddeal Oy, 26.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Heini Lehtinen</b>	Editor-in-chief, FashionFINLAND.com / Preview Fashion Media Oy, 15.02.2008, Helsinki Finland
<b>Helinä Luttinen</b>	Sales representative, mervi~helinä, 15.11.2007, Rotterdam the Netherlands
<b>Tuija-Maija Piironen</b>	Designer, Intercolor Finland ICfin, 14.03.2008 Helsinki Finland
<b>Victor Portes</b>	Director, Stichting Revolving Fund Dutch Catwalk, 19.12.2007, Amsterdam the Netherlands
<b>Mia Puntila</b>	Domestic Sale Manager, Marimekko Oyj, 17.03.2008, Helsinki Finland
<b>Tiina Railio</b>	Purchasing Director Fashion, Stockmann Oyj, 20.03.2008, Helsinki Finland
<b>Lina Simolinna</b>	Director, Kauppa, 28.12.2007, Amsterdam the Netherlands
<b>Bibi Straatman</b>	Lecturer cultural studies and semiotics, Utrecht School of the Arts – departments of Fashion Design and Digital Media Design, 05.12.2007, Utrecht the Netherlands
<b>Rens Tap</b>	Senior Consultant, Modint BV, 06.02.2008, Zeist the Netherlands
<b>Erik Verdonck</b>	Head of Fashion Department, Royal Academy of Arts, 18.12.2007 The Hague the Netherlands
<b>Renske Versluijs</b>	Student of Master of Arts in Design, Utrecht School of the Arts – Fashion Design department, 05.12.2007, Utrecht the Netherlands
<b>Dick van der Vlies</b>	Head Lecturer fashion design & styling, Artemis Stylingacademie, 18.02.2008, Rotterdam the Netherlands

### **Appendix 3. List of interview questions**

1. What could you say about clothing industry in general in Finland/the Netherlands? What are its specifics?
2. How would you describe clothing style/design and fashion common for Finnish/Dutch consumers; men and women?
3. Are Finnish/Dutch consumers fashion oriented – do they buy mainly fashionable items? Could you describe?
4. How would you describe typical Finnish/Dutch values? What things in the values you think have an effect on clothing purchase/preference decision?
5. Do you think that there are subgroups whose clothing preferences differ from each other? How would you describe these groups and the differences in the clothing /style between these groups?
6. How would you explain these differing preferences from the point of view of socio-cultural values / subculture / lifestyles?
7. Do Finnish/Dutch people adapt fast new styles?
8. Who/which are according to your opinion the biggest influencers, who/which influence the consumers' clothing preferences? Could you name them?
9. What should clothing design communicate in order to attract consumer?
10. Could you describe which variants of line, shape, color, texture and materials are the most popular in Finland/the Netherlands?
11. What are the most popular clothing brands? What do these brands communicate to their customers? Which aspects of these brands make them attractive to consumers?